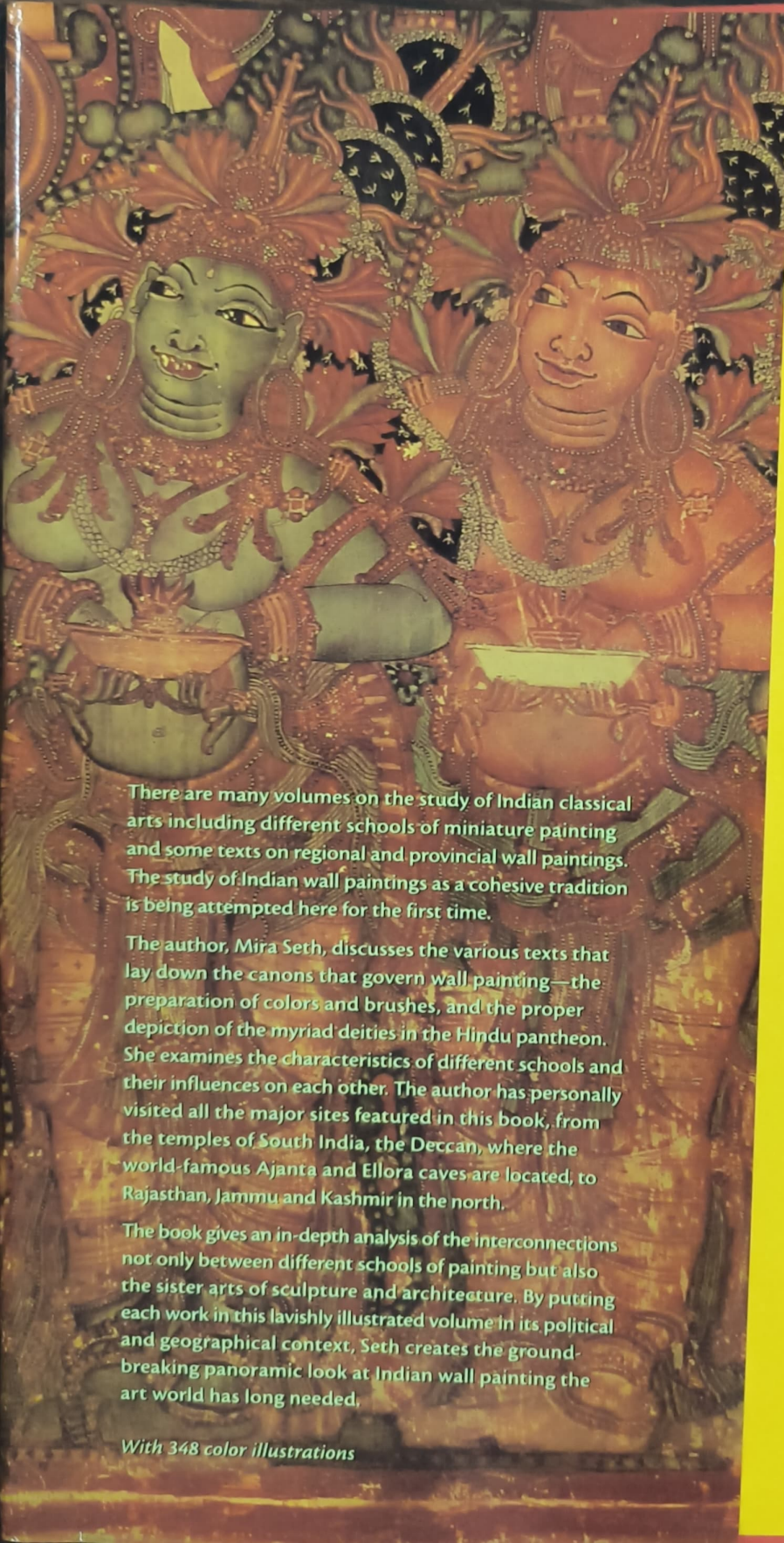


MIRA SETH

# INDIAN PAINTING

THE GREAT MURAL TRADITION





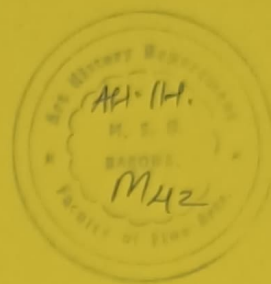
There are many volumes on the study of Indian classical arts including different schools of miniature painting and some texts on regional and provincial wall paintings. The study of Indian wall paintings as a cohesive tradition is being attempted here for the first time.

The author, Mira Seth, discusses the various texts that lay down the canons that govern wall painting—the preparation of colors and brushes, and the proper depiction of the myriad deities in the Hindu pantheon. She examines the characteristics of different schools and their influences on each other. The author has personally visited all the major sites featured in this book, from the temples of South India, the Deccan, where the world-famous Ajanta and Ellora caves are located, to Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir in the north.

The book gives an in-depth analysis of the interconnections not only between different schools of painting but also the sister arts of sculpture and architecture. By putting each work in this lavishly illustrated volume in its political and geographical context, Seth creates the ground-breaking panoramic look at Indian wall painting the art world has long needed.

*With 348 color illustrations*

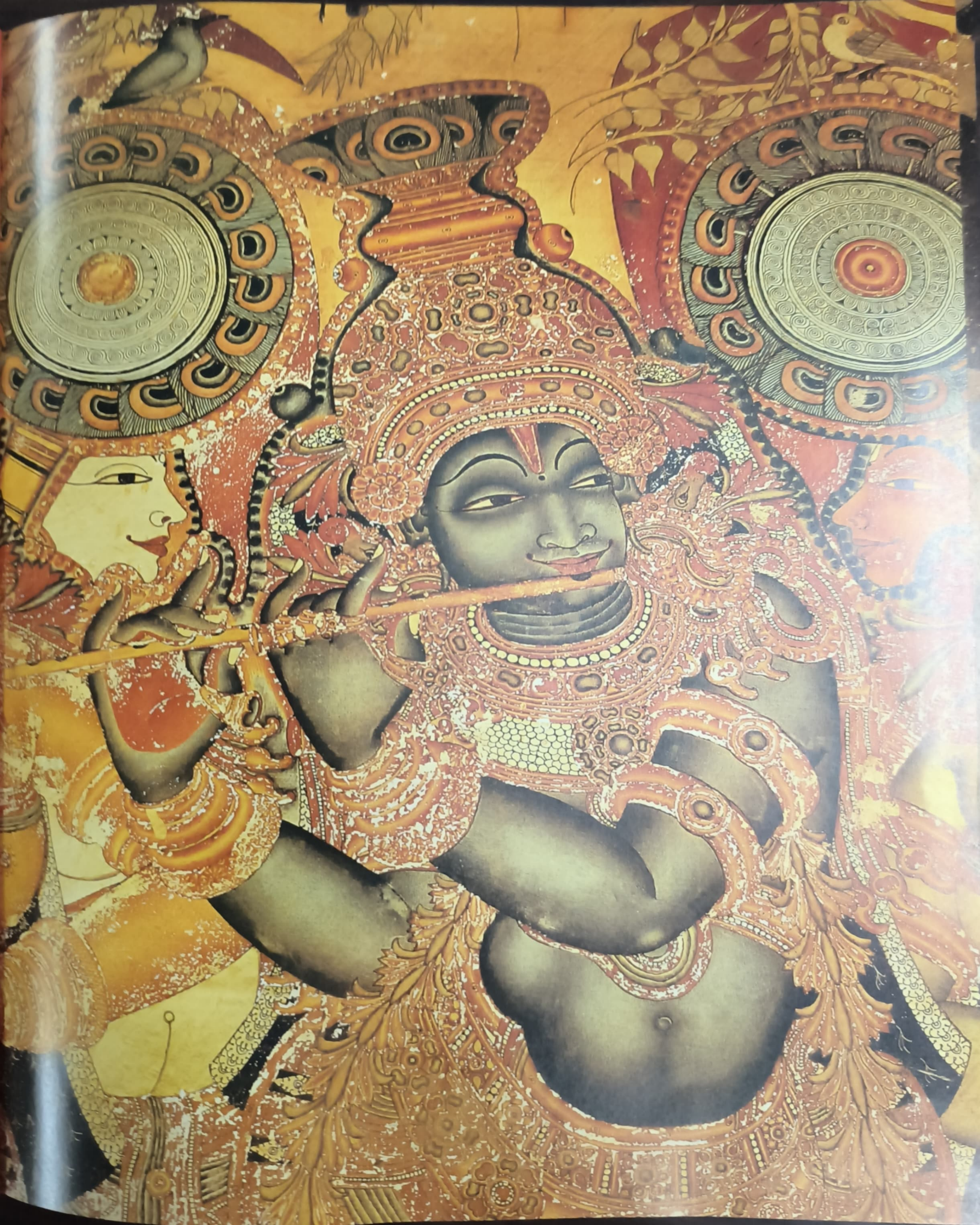
















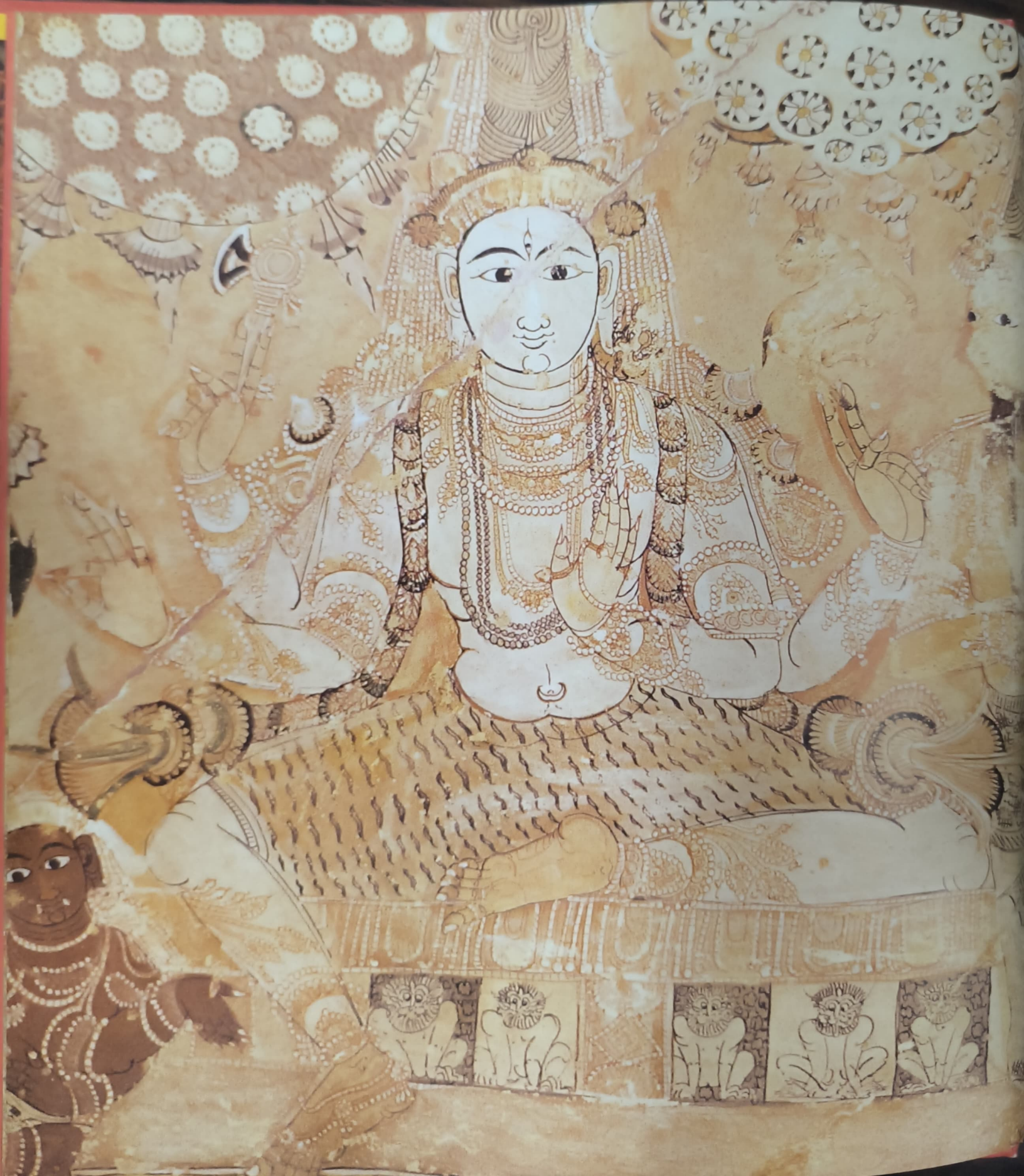
































~INDIAN PAINTING~









~INDIAN PAINTING~  
The Great Mural Tradition

MIRA SETH

MAPIN PUBLISHING





—Dedicated to my Guru Shri Ramakrishna Parmahansa—

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**T**he Indian wall painting tradition is the product of the composite culture of a land of great physical splendor, a rich racial mix, a long history and a complex religious, social and economic ethos. India is bound in the north by the Himalayas, in the northwest by the Hindu Kush and the Pamirs and in the northeast by the Patka and Naga Hills. They provided geographical seclusion and security. The Himalayas, considered the abode of God, have become a cultural icon.<sup>1</sup>

A high plateau stretches across the Deccan and is cut on the sides by the Eastern and Western Ghats along the coastline. The peninsula has the hill ranges of the Vindhyas and Satpura. India has fertile plains in the north, endowed with large perennial rivers like the Indus, Satluj, Beas, Ravi, Ganga and Yamuna. In the south flow the Kaveri and the Godavari, in the west the Narmada and Tapti, and in the northeast the Brahmaputra. There are deserts in the northwest. India has rich flora and fauna; mineral wealth of diamonds, gold, iron, copper, zinc and magnetite; many climatic zones; varieties of soils; and rains provided mostly by the monsoons, which have acquired a mythical quality. Great civilizations rose on riverbanks with fertile soils, which provided a good living. The absence of struggle for existence spared time for intellectual pursuits and generated a speculative turn of mind ready to delve into philosophy and literature. The long summers of the desert lands, the heavy monsoons of the northeast and the coastal areas, and the extreme winter of the mountains provided time for handicrafts and arts.

The people of India, according to a survey published in 1992, consist of 4,635 communities, identified by common origins, social and cultural traits. Genetic similarities cut across class and regions and cannot be identified on the basis of race.<sup>2</sup> There are different theories about the origin of the Indus Valley civilization of 2700 BC. The question of Aryan (300–1500 BC) origin and migration to India is also controversial.<sup>3</sup> The Greeks invaded India in 326 BC and again two centuries later, but touched only the northwest border. The Scythians came to East Punjab and up to Mathura in AD 15, while the Kushanas came in AD 78 and subsequently established an empire from Bihar to Khorasan and Konkan in the south.<sup>4</sup> The Hunas came in the fifth century. The Islamic onslaught began in the seventh century and the arrival of Westerners in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Only the people from Europe went back; the rest were all absorbed, contributing to a rich culture.

In political terms, there were city-states to start with, then tribal kingdoms and finally big and small kingdoms. The Mauryas (320–187 BC) founded a large empire, contributing to culture in the form of architecture and sculpture, a new image of kingship enunciated by Emperor Ashoka in his edicts,<sup>5</sup> and the spread of Buddhism outside India. The Guptas (AD 329–570)—whose rule is considered the Golden Age of Indian history in literature, architecture, and sculpture—saw the production of the first book on wall painting, namely the *Chitrasutra*,<sup>6</sup> and ruled primarily in the north and east of India. Several smaller kingdoms rose in the Deccan and in the south, contributing to the development of Indian art, especially wall painting. The most significant of these were the Satavahanas (first to fourth century AD). The Vakatakas (fourth to fifth century AD), Chalukyas (sixth to eighth century AD) and the Rashtrakutas (eighth century AD), were other dynasties during whose political predominance centers of wall paintings

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came up in Badami and Ellora. Further south in Tamil Nadu were the Cholas (first century BC), the Pallavas (fourth century AD) and the Pandyas (during Ashoka's time and later on in the ninth century), while Kerala had the Cheras (third century BC). In the north and northwest were powerful kings, like Lalitaditya (AD 724–760) of Kashmir. In Rajasthan, the Gurjara Pratiharas rose in Mandore and Alwar, the Chauhans in Bundi, the Jhalas, Malots and the Guhillas in Mewar, the Rashtrakutas in Marwar and the Yadavs in Jaisalmer—all of whom were great patrons of wall paintings.

India first came in contact with Islamic influence in the seventh century, but significant political influence was established only through the raids of the Yamini dynasty of Ghazni in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The Ghuris and the Slave dynasty ruled in parts of north India in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, until the Khiljis established a large empire (AD 1296–1316). After them came the Tughlaqs (AD 1320–1462). This period, known as the “Sultanate period”, produced a genre of paintings incorporating Mid-Eastern influences in Indian traditions. During this period, powerful kingdoms emerged in the Deccan and further south, namely the Bahmanis and the Vijayanagara rulers who produced distinguished schools of painting. The most prominent invading dynasty to arrive was that of the Mughals under Babar, originally from Ferghana, Central Asia. Humayun (r. AD 1530–1556) brought in two Persian painters, and his son Akbar (r. AD 1556–1605) later set up an atelier with both Muslim and Hindu painters. Akbar's son Jahangir (r. AD 1605–1627) was a remarkable aesthete and introduced greater naturalism in Indian painting. Shahjahan (AD 1628–1658), the builder of the Taj Mahal, was also a patron of painting. This dynasty brought in Persian, Turkish and Arab influences, which had a great impact on Indian artistic traditions. The Marathas, who were a predominant political power in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the European commercial undertakings, that started arriving in the 15<sup>th</sup> century did not influence the art of wall paintings in any direct way.

Four of the world's major religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism—originated here, and these faiths provided the greatest impetus to wall painting. The Indo-Sanskrit linguistic group that produced the *Vedas* in their oral form as early as 1500 BC were not the only contributors to the development of Hinduism. It was further enriched by the aboriginal tribal communities and the Dravidians. The Indo-Sanskrit linguistic group were pastoral people constantly on the move. They deified the various natural phenomenon they encountered so that thunder became Indra; Varuna represented water; Surya, the sun; Agni, fire; Mitra, activity; Soma, a nectar fit for the gods; Chandra, the moon; and the two stars that showed the way at night along with the moon, the Ashwins. The calmer elements became the female goddesses, like Aditi, the earth; Usha, the dawn; and Ratri, the night. These deities did not have anthropomorphic forms in the beginning, though they had human attributes. They were upholders of *rita*, moral order. The concept of *karma*, action, was born.

The *Upanishads*, 108 in number, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century BC propounded that the self was the only reality, and that the essence of man and of the universe is the same—*brahman*, the almighty, and *atman*, inner spirit, was inherent in everything in the universe. Self-realization through meditation would lead to *mukti*, freedom—a state of absolute infinitude, pure intelligence and pure bliss. They also believed in the transmigration of



souls. The pantheon of gods developed later. The most important gods were Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the nurturer, and Shiva, the destroyer. The Vedic gods also produced Mahamaya, the great mother goddess, from their essence.<sup>7</sup> The most powerful hegemony of the gods continued to be patriarchal, and Shiva and Vishnu emerged as the most powerful and pervasive deities of the trinity, with the predominance of the Shaiva and Vaishnava cults. The Kushana kings, Huna Mihirkula, the Pushyabhutis of Kanauj, the Vallabhis of Gujarat, and many Chalukya, Rashtrakuta, Pallava and Chola kings were Shaivas. Great writers like Kalidasa, who lived circa fourth century AD, with his *Kumarasambhava*; Bhairavi in circa sixth century with *Kiratarjuniyam*; Appar and Sambhandhar in the seventh century; and Sundaramurti and Manikkavachakkar later on, inspired wall paintings. The concept of Shiva Ardhanarishvara also emerged. The Sankhya system of philosophy established that *purusha*, the male principle, is by nature inactive while *prakriti*, the female principle, is creative, and the two act together. This led to the emergence of Shaktism.

Vaishnavism claims its origin from the *Rigveda*, in which Vishnu is mentioned, but it really develops in the *Mahabharata*, which is supposed to have been composed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC through *gita upadesha*, the sermon of the *Gita* in the battlefield. The *Bhagvata Purana* (sixth century AD) carries the story further. Vishnu had ten incarnations, but the most popular were Rama and Krishna. The Guptas, some Chola kings and many Vijayanagara rulers were Vaishnavas. The Vaishnava Bhakti cult, inspired by the Nayanmar poets of the south—followed later by Ramanuja and the teachings of the Vallabhacharya cult of Pushtimarg—was to influence the subject matter of painting, especially illustrating the divine love of Radha and Krishna. The poet Mirabai (AD 1503–1563), a princess of Mewar, propounded complete love, self-identification and surrender to Krishna. Surdas (AD 1503–1567) sang of Krishna as a *sakha*, friend; and Tulsidas (AD 1523–1623) preached the *dasa bhava*, the devotion of a servant for the master, in his classic *Ramacharित्रमानस*, the story of Rama. The Bhakti movement, which began in Orissa and Bengal through Chaitanya, who was born in Bengal in 1486, inspired a great deal of painting in Orissa devoted to the cult of Krishna. Hinduism to this day believes in the Vedic gods, in the trinity of gods, and in many other *vyantara devatas*, gods and goddesses from folk cults: *yakshas*, the doorkeepers; *gandharvas*, the emissaries of the gods; *nagas*, snakes; *apsaras*, heavenly dancers; and the *vidyadharas* who attend the deities.

Jainism, the second oldest religion in India, originated in 1500 BC. Its most powerful exponent was Mahavira, a prince born in the state of Bihar in 598 BC. He stated that there is no universally pervasive *brahman* and that all things are illusory but possess many qualities, which can be affirmed at a particular moment of time. Jains preach self-control, truthfulness, purity, chastity, avoidance of greed, and living a simple moral life. Their greatest contribution to Indian culture was non-violence, vegetarianism, and the pursuit of commerce as a less violent occupation than agriculture. It spread to all parts of India, and kings, merchants and commoners all contributed to its propagation by not only building temples with Jain wall paintings but also creating *bhandaras*, storehouses, to which illustrated manuscripts on Jain teachings were donated as a religious duty. Their extreme caution, resourcefulness and sense of insecurity led them to bury their treasures during Muslim invasions, which led to the preservation of their heritage. Jainism spread



all over India, its most renowned follower being Chandragupta Maurya, the grandfather of Ashoka. The Gangas of Mysore and the Kadambas of Banvasi were also followers of Jainism.

Prince Gautama, born in 560 BC, preached an ethical way of life to break the circle of disease, suffering, death and rebirth—the eightfold path of right speech, mindfulness, meditation, resolution, point of view, action, exertion and livelihood. Like the Jains, Buddha did not propound the concept of God and believed that self-realization through *nirvana*, literally “extinction”, led to the cessation of birth and suffering. Buddhism split into two main sects—the Theravada and the Mahayana. A great scholar of Indian philosophy, Surendranath Dasgupta, writes that this division took place as early as 400 BC.<sup>8</sup> Both the sects believed in Buddha’s teachings but the former felt that they should strive for their own salvation, while the latter professed that their goal was the salvation of all. The Mahayana belief gave rise to the concept of the Bodhisattva incarnations of Buddha, who strove for the salvation of all even if it meant postponing his own cessation from the cycle of rebirth. A sub-school of the Mahayana was the Vajrayana, whose adherents developed a complicated ritual of worship based on *tantra*, texts; *mantra*, spiritual hymns; *sadhana*, meditation; and *mandala*, defining meditation practices. This belief system also included *siddhas*, realized souls.

Buddhism had a tremendous impact on Indian society for more than a millennium, loosening the hold of caste, introducing an ethical code of living and emphasizing non-violence. Monastic orders were set up for proselytizing the message of Buddha. This was to influence the setting up of such orders by the Hindus and the Jains. This encouraged missionary activity, and missions were sent as early as Ashoka’s time (273–236 BC) to Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Khotan. The Kushanas promoted Buddhism in Central Asia in Kucha, Qarashahr, and Turfan in the first century AD and in Kashgar in the second century. Buddhism may have arrived in China in the first century and ultimately in Tibet in the seventh century.<sup>9</sup> This paved the way for cultural influences, revolutionizing the artistic traditions of these countries, especially wall painting.

Iconography in Indian art was meticulously studied. Several texts were written in India on iconography, giving details on sculpture as well as painting. These evolved over centuries and help us to understand not only religious practices but also the rise and fall of cults. Among the Hindus the defining iconographic marks of the three great gods are clear. Vishnu, the nurturer, generally has four arms, holding a conch shell, a discus, a lotus and a sword. In his recumbent pose, Vishnu Seshasayi, he is illustrated lying on a multi-headed snake with Lakshmi, his consort, holding his feet. In his Virat *roop*, cosmic form, he is depicted with the universe inside his open mouth. His favorite incarnations, Rama and Krishna, are both dark-complexioned. Rama generally holds a bow and arrow or wears a crown, and is often shown with Sita, his wife; Lakshmana, his brother; or Hanumana, his *bhakta*, devotee. Krishna invariably wears a yellow *dhoti*, lower garment, a peacock feather in his hair and is often seen playing his flute, accompanied by Radha, his beloved, and the *gopis*, milkmaids, of Vrindavana. As for his other incarnations, Vishnu as Narsimha has the torso of a lion; as Varaha he has the snout of a boar; as Vamana he is a dwarf. In the Matsya *avatara*, incarnation, he has the body of a fish; as Kurma, the body of a



tortoise; as Balarama, he is depicted with a plough; and as Kalki, on a horse. Garuda, a large mythical bird-like creature with a long beak, is his vehicle.

Shiva, the god of destruction and compassion, has been equally well identified. He was first worshipped in his generative aspect as the *linga* or phallic symbol, generally black though sometimes white. He usually has a dark blue complexion; matted hair that is tied in a knot on the top of his head and adorned with the moon and the river Ganga cascading through it; snakes all over his body as ornaments; and *rudraksha malas*, rosaries made of berries of the *Elaeocarpus ganitrus*, around his neck and his arms. He is depicted on hilltops or with mountains in the background. He is sometimes depicted with two arms and sometimes with four, holding a *trishul*, trident; a *damru*, small drum; *agni*, fire; and a *mriga*, deer. He usually sits in the *padmasana*, cross-legged yogic pose, but sometimes with one leg crossed under him and the other hanging down. He is often seen with Parvati at his side and their two children, Ganesha—with an elephant head; and Kartikeya—seated on a mouse. Nandi, the bull, is Shiva's vehicle. He is frequently illustrated as Nataraja, the lord of dance; as Kalyanmurti, marrying Parvati; as Tripurantaka, destroying demons; as Ardhanarishvara, half man and half woman; and as Hari Hara, half Vishnu and half Shiva, to emphasize the unity of Vaishnavism and Shaivism.

Brahma generally has four heads, often a beard, and sometimes a staff in one hand and a bowl in the other.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes he is shown riding a swan or in the company of his daughter Sarasvati. Mahamaya, the great mother goddess, is usually shown with plants and vegetables. As destroyer of evil she is called Mahishasuramardani and rides a lion, wears a mustard-colored sari and holds various weapons in her several hands. Other gods and goddesses have their own iconographic forms.

The earliest iconographic symbology of Jain deities is described in Hindu texts like the *Brihat Samhita*,<sup>11</sup> the *Manasara* and the *Rupmandala*, which prescribe nudity,<sup>12</sup> long arms, the auspicious Srivatsa mark on the chest, and meditative poses. The *Rupmandala* prescribes the colors to be used. The Tirthankaras are further shown either in *yoga mudra*, seated with hands held in a lotus-bud *mudra* (hand gesture) or in *varda mudra*, where the hands are held outward.<sup>13</sup> Tirthankaras are depicted with trees in the background bearing celestial fruits with *yakshas*, *yakshis* and *gandharvas* as their attendants, holding umbrellas over their heads. Separate identifying marks were prescribed for each Tirthankara later. The Jains also had female goddesses who are not as frequently illustrated as the Tirthankaras but still have their own iconographic formulae. The Jains incorporated various Hindu gods called *dikpalas*, like Indra, Agni, Yama, Nariti, Varuna, Kubera, Isanna, Brahma and Nagas. The *vyotish devas*, gods of astrology, called the *navgrahas* or nine planets—Surya, Mangala, Buddha, Brihaspati, Shukra, Shani, Rahu, Ketu and Chandra—were also adopted. The Jains innovated with new iconographic formulae like *samavasarana*, the circles containing the Tirthankara to be meditated upon in the center, with pilgrims of different Jain worlds traveling towards the center. The Jains also started illustrating their pilgrimage centers. As the Jains belong mostly to the commercial class, they started the practice of writing illustrated *patras*, letters—*vijnan patras* for information, *kshama patras* for pardon, and *chitrakavyas*, poems with vivid pictures used for communication. The Jains also created illustrated playing cards called *gyanbazi*. Finally, we have Jain cosmographic figures painted on cloth, on paper and on walls.



Buddhist texts on iconography seem to have evolved several centuries after the Buddha. The *stupa*, dome enclosed with railings, was the first to arrive, followed by *chaityas*, rock-cut caves. The Mahayana sect increased innovations because of its intense zeal to spread Buddha's message. From Ajanta onwards we see Buddha represented in painting. His *mudras* define his presence. Buddhist mythology in the form of *Jatakas* provided stories about Bodhisattvas and their attendants. With the evolution of Vajrayana in the seventh century AD, Buddhist iconography becomes very complex, and will be discussed in "Centers of Wall Painting: North and East India", in the section on Ladakh.

Many iconographic texts are of Hindu origin and it is interesting to observe that iconographic symbols often cut across religious divides, with many of the iconographic signs common to two or more religions. Vishnu's *sudarshan chakra* and the Buddhist *dharma chakra* take the form of the divine wheel. The *padmasana*, or seated lotus position is common to all, as are the hand *mudras*, gestures. The popularity of the tantric and Bhakti movements led to the proliferation of deities. Soon all the chief deities acquired consorts; *yakshas*, *yakshinis*, *vahanas* (or vehicles), animal and human attendants, and favorite trees. The Buddhist Mahakala is blue, like Shiva. Shiva's bull is also depicted, along with the Jain Tirthankara Rishabhdev. It is well known that the twenty-second Tirthankara, Neminath, is believed to have been Lord Krishna's cousin. Mahamaya is adopted as Shakti by the Buddhists and as a mother goddess by the Jains. The cosmic forms of Vishnu and Buddha multiplying themselves show all the creatures of the universe within them, thus explaining how the universe is contained within them.

Iconographic variations exist along with regional variations, especially among Hindu and Buddhist icons in the north and the south. Among the Jains these variations are very slight. The concept of destruction through the violent aspects of deities is more prevalent in Hindu and Buddhist art than in Jain art. It may also be pointed out that sectarian feuds often led to images of various gods paying homage to gods of other sects. Hindu gods are depicted paying homage to Buddhist deities in the Sumtsek Temple in the Alchi monastery in Ladakh. It is interesting to note that line, pigments and methods of coloring change contemporaneously. It is also known that artists were employed to paint and sculpt regardless of their caste and religion. Later, Muslim artists painted sacred Hindu themes. This may have contributed to similarities in style.

The social norms of Indian society also had a powerful impact on the tradition of wall painting. Certain social norms cut across all religious divides. The first and foremost was that of a holistic view of life in which all forms of creation were pervaded by *atman*. The second was that life was for the pursuit not only of *dharma*, righteousness, and *moksha*, salvation, but also of *artha*, wealth, and *kama*, erotic desire. Society was not stratified in the beginning, and though the concept of caste was initiated by the "*Purush Sukta*" in the *Rigveda*,<sup>14</sup> it was based more on occupations. Kingship cut across caste lines with Brahmin kings like the Satavahanas and Vakatakas, Vaishya rulers like the Guptas, and Sudra dynasties like the Nandas and the Nayakas. The patronage of wall painting was a function of political power and wealth. Kings, aristocrats,<sup>15</sup> merchants, monks, *mathas* or temples, monasteries, and both men and women were patrons.



All the classes of society celebrated both seasonal and religious festivals, and loved color and embellishment. All this had an impact on the wonderful colors of the wall paintings. A concept common to Hindus, Buddhists and Jains, and later, Muslims was pilgrimage to sacred places associated with their gods and holy men. This was a great mode of culturalization because it served as a means of communication of ideas, through pilgrims carrying sacred books, icons, sculpted images, illustrated *thangkas* and *patachitras*—paintings on cloth. When the pilgrims rested for the night they were often given shelter by the local communities and in this way ideas were exchanged. Literary and artistic style, as well as religious influences, traveled with these pilgrims. The concept of *daana*, charity, which cuts across all religions, was practiced everywhere. This led to donations to many temples, as stated in their inscriptions,<sup>16</sup> and to monasteries and *mathas*, which resulted in the creation of a great number of works of art.

The patrons and artists of India were products of a highly developed system of education. Gurus first imparted education in their *ashrams*, residences. Later, royalty, temples, merchants and local communities funded schools and colleges. Buddhist, Jain and Hindu monasteries also imparted education. In the early centuries after Christ the concept of universities emerged. Of these, Taxila in the north,<sup>17</sup> Nalanda in Bihar, Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, Vallabhi in Gujarat, and Vikramshila and Uddhantapuri in eastern India were well known. With the Muslim invasions many ancient universities declined and new centers came into existence at Lahore, Agra, Delhi, Jaunpur, Ahmedabad and Sialkot.<sup>18</sup> We know that Buddhist *viharas*, monasteries, had large libraries.<sup>19</sup> The personal libraries of rulers—like the Mughal emperors Humayun and Akbar; and the Maharajas of Amber, Marwar and Mewar in Rajasthan; and Mysore—contained books which were also to influence the patrons' selection of themes for illustration in miniatures and wall paintings.

A unique intellectual and literary tradition inspired artistic endeavor not only in the form of subject matter for illustration but also in its imagery and iconography. The classical tradition produced—before the Christian era—the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas*, and also the *mahakavyas*, great epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* of the sages Vyas and Valmiki. The *Bhagvata Purana*, the *Shiva Purana*, and the *Markandeya Purana*—all of which subsequently have been profusely illustrated—provided stories regarding Krishna, Shiva and the Devi. Great Sanskrit secular literature was also produced, like *kavyas*, epic poems, and the plays of Kalidasa. The *Kathasaritsagar*, the *Panchatantra*, and *Sukraniti* also provided subject matter for painting.

Among the Buddhists the life of Buddha, written in the *Lalitvistara* and the *Buddha-charitra*, along with the *Mahaparinirvana*, *Chaturparishad*, *Mahasamaj*, *Dhamaka*, *Kalpanamandika*, *Divyavadana*—and above all the *Jatakamalas*, the *Prajnaparamita*, the *Kriandavuhasutra* and the *Vasudharadharani*—was to form the subject matter of wall painting. The Jains too produced *mahakavyas* and *puranas*, divine legends, but the subject matter of Jain wall painting is mostly *charitas*, biographies of the Tirthankaras. The most famous of these are the *mahakavyas* of Gunachandra, the *Adhinatha charita* of Vardhamana, and the *Santinath charita* of Devachandra—all written in AD 1103—the *Parshavnath charita* of AD 1108 and the *Neminath charita*, *Haribhadra charita*, *Mallinath charita* and *Chandraprabha charita* of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Regional languages created a



vast body of literature whose thematic content influenced the wall painting tradition. Similarly, the Sultanate, Mughal, Deccani, Malwa and Oudh kingdoms—and some feudatory states—were to produce their own literary masterpieces, which would influence the tradition of painting.

Four characteristics stand out in India's literary history. The first is that literary forms like epic poems, plays and *puranas* were uniformly adopted by the adherents of all religions. The second is that the same subjects were written about in different regions and by adherents of different religions contemporaneously. Sufi and Bhakti literature was produced from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards in Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, Gujarati, Marathi, Dingal and Pingal (in Rajasthan), Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada, Persian, Turkish and Arabic, in different parts of the country. The third important characteristic, which often confuses foreigners, is the broad sweep of the authors who describe events in different worlds—not only heaven, earth and the underworld (which happens in Greek literature also), but also several other Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain *lokas*, universes. Communication between the worlds of the humans and those of heavenly bodies on various planets is described as easy—which often makes the interpretation of paintings difficult, as happened originally in the case of Ajanta. The fourth great distinction of Indian literature is its musicality. Most *mahakavyas* and dramas lend themselves to singing and have a certain rhythm. The artists, when they paint these themes, are conscious of this element and use it in depicting movement and color.

The great heritage of Indian wall painting could not have continued for over 2,000 years if its economic resource base had not been strong and extensive. Agriculture was the most flourishing occupation. The *Arthashastra* testifies that the Mauryan empire was based on agricultural prosperity.<sup>20</sup> The *Amarkosha* refers to thriving agriculture during the Gupta period.<sup>21</sup> *Harshacharitra*<sup>22</sup> and Hiuen Tsang praised India's agricultural economy.<sup>23</sup> During the periods of the Satavahanas, Vakatakas, Cholas, Pallavas, Cheras and the Vijayanagara kingdoms, agriculture flourished. This prosperity continued in the early medieval period; Ibn Batuta, who visited India in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, applauds the economy.<sup>24</sup> The excellent revenue system developed by the Mughals was to further strengthen agriculture. The availability of agricultural surpluses led to the construction of towns, the growth of small-scale industries, and feats of architectural marvel like the excavation of caves and the construction of monasteries, temples, forts, palaces, mosques and tombs. India had a rich tradition of handicrafts, of which the *Jatakas* mention eighteen.<sup>25</sup> Jewelry-making, gem setting<sup>26</sup> and pearl fishing were widely prevalent. The best-known craft was handloom, practiced everywhere, which produced exportable surpluses.

Agricultural and industrial surpluses led to the building of towns in state capitals, in centers of surpluses and at pilgrimage centers. Artists congregated to these urban conurbations for employment and were available to patrons of art. Banking and credit facilities came into existence very early in India's economic history as did trade as a result of these surpluses. Trade routes existed at least from the sixth century BC. The Uttarapatha consisted of two northern routes, one from Mathura to the northwest and the other from Patliputra in Bihar to Pratisthana in Maharashtra. During medieval times routes from the north to the south existed via Gujarat and Maharashtra to Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Several smaller routes linked market towns.



India's external trade is also of very ancient origin, beginning with Harappan trade with Mesopotamia through the sea routes of the Persian Gulf.<sup>27</sup> The *Rigveda* mentions men going to the *samudra*, ocean, eager for gain.<sup>28</sup> Trade received ideological strength from Buddhism, as at the conceptual level it stressed not *varnas*, caste, but *kula*, family, or occupation. A significant factor in Buddhist society was the occupational division among people for purposes of identification. The system of stratification was an existential reality without religious sanction. The early Pali texts identify agriculture, trade, archery and the service of kings as higher occupations.<sup>29</sup> A certain aura of respectability was created for trade and the production of wealth, and here the *gahpatis* were a very important part of society. The *Digha Nikaya* mentions the *gahpatis* as the treasurers of the rulers. They were the main benefactors of the monasteries. The Buddhists did not believe in the concept of *mlecchas*, foreigners. The evolution of the concept of Dhyani Buddha Avalokiteshvara as the protector of seafarers was to further promote trade. The rise of the monastic orders also helped trade. Monasteries gave permission to monks to travel with trading caravans. They gave shelter to merchants in their *aramas*, rest-houses, and most important, encouraged a trading diaspora by giving them space for holding *upostha*, assemblies, among themselves and with locals, which enabled them to exchange information and resolve disputes. The *sangha*, community, itself became a repository of information and also provided communication skills.

It is possible that there were trade links with Persia during the Achaemenian period.<sup>30</sup> Links were also created with Greece from the fourth century BC<sup>31</sup> exporting pepper, pearls, cinnamon, cassia and exotic birds and animals, while perhaps importing wine, myrrh, frankincense and Greek black pottery from the fourth to sixth century (found in Taxila).<sup>32</sup> Greek merchants, called Yavanas, are known to have been in the Deccan during the Satavahana period. Trade with Egypt existed from the first to the fourth century.<sup>33</sup> The *Periplus Maris Erythraei* mentions trade between India and Rome all along the western and eastern coastlines in the early centuries after Christ. The exports from India consisted of costus, spikenard, Chinese silk yarn, grain, rice, sesame, oil, ghee, cane sugar and textiles. The imports consisted of coral, brocade, frankincense, glass vessels, wines, slaves and musicians.<sup>34</sup> Several Roman coins have been found in India. Earlier writers like Wormington believed<sup>35</sup> that gold drained from the Roman empire to India may have led to that empire's collapse. This seems too far-fetched as there were many reasons for the collapse of the Roman empire<sup>36</sup> but it does show that the balance of trade was in India's favor.

Trade with Central Asia existed from very early times. Buddhist missionaries went to this area from the time of Emperor Ashoka while caravans left from northwest India, including Kashmir and Ladakh, for Afghanistan, Chinese Turkistan, Khotan, Kucha, Kashgar, Yarkand and Turfan. Trade was further strengthened during the Muslim period. The Mughals carried on trade with Ferghana, Turkestan, Samarqand, Balkh, Bokhara, Hisal and Badakshan. In Asia, trade with Burma, Thailand and Malaysia existed from the fourth century BC and included beads, cotton cloth and agricultural surpluses.<sup>37</sup> Imports included gold, aromatics and spices. Several crafts in these countries like brick-making, image-making and bead-making were inspired by Indian contact a few centuries after Christ.<sup>38</sup> Trade with China exists from at least Mauryan times; Chinese silk is mentioned in the *Arthashastra*.<sup>39</sup> It was conducted from the eastern coastline as well



as through the land routes from Central Asia and via Burma and Thailand. Trade with Arabia also existed from very early times<sup>40</sup> and Arabian shipping took over the monopoly from many Hindu concerns during the medieval period.

Finally, Indian overseas trade greatly expanded after coming into contact with the Western traders from Portugal, Holland, Britain and France from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It brought great prosperity to India to begin with, leading to a tremendous expansion in production as well as internal trade, especially in the Gangetic valley. Ultimately, however, foreign companies took over most of its trade, reducing the share of Indian businessmen. The great renaissance of the wall painting tradition in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, both in the north and the south, was due to trade-based surpluses.

Indian history is the story of centrifugal and centripetal tendencies. Various races came and were drawn into the cultural vortex of India, enriching it, and no confrontation lasted forever. India was the Golden Hind, legendary for its wealth. Virile predators pillaged the country and took untold wealth, literally tons of rubies, diamonds, gold, animals and humans, and later destroyed its trade and industry. They traumatized the polity but in cultural terms many caused no ripples in the stream, while others brought rich rivulets to join the main stream, which grew and devised new forms. It is this stream that produced the great Indian tradition of wall painting.~





## CENTERS OF WALL PAINTING: THE DECCAN AND SOUTH INDIA



The paintings on rock surfaces from the Mesolithic period indicate the prehistoric origin of India's painting tradition. There are a profusion of rock shelters with painted surfaces in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Bihar and Rajasthan. The most famous Mesolithic sites are at Bhimbetka, Jaora, Kathotia, Ramchaja, Munika Pahar, Lakhajuar and Gandhi Sagar. Some of these sites continued to be painted in the Chalcolithic period as well, while in some centers, painting of this genre continued for several centuries. Although these paintings belong to the prehistoric period, they cannot really be called primitive, though this appellation has been given to rock paintings found in Europe. These paintings are a mix of extremely sophisticated line and an understanding of the principles of movement. With a few strokes a human or animal form emerges, though animals are a little more realistically painted. The favorite color of Indian artists through the ages, namely *gerua* or saffron is predominant. These paintings clearly reflect the hunter-gatherer lifestyles of the people who painted them during the Mesolithic period, and show evidence of agricultural pursuits in the later period. The delicacy of line, profuse use of basic earth colors, movement and symbolism were to mark later Indian traditions of painting as well.

The earliest remnants of wall painting are found in the Jogimara Caves of Madhya Pradesh. Most of them have become indecipherable due to the ravages of time, but they can be dated to the second century BC. The earliest preserved wall paintings are available at Ajanta, but the excellence of the painting style of Ajanta would not have been possible without a previous style of painting. It is a classical tradition indicating a long period of gestation and evolution.

## AJANTA

The caves at Ajanta were obviously carved out as monks' retreats for meditation and reflection during the Indian monsoon season known as Chaturmasa—when the rules of Buddhist monkhood require that they go into retreat (Fig. 11).

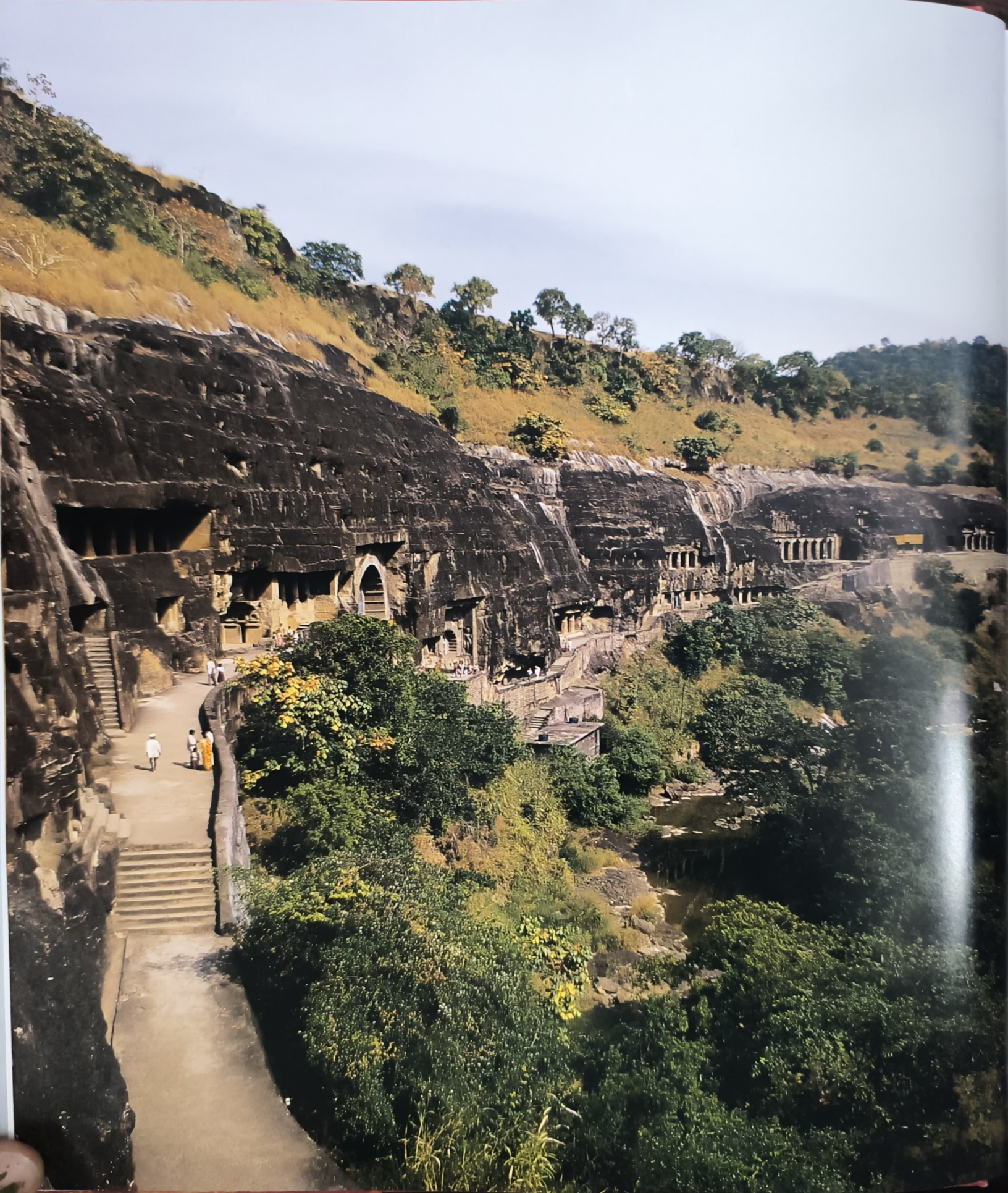
It was the location on the Waghora River in Maharashtra that kept the site hidden for centuries after the eighth-century mention by Hiuen Tsang, a Chinese pilgrim who visited India.<sup>1</sup> When British army officers finally discovered it in 1819, they named it Ajanta. Fergusson prepared the first scholarly report in 1846<sup>2</sup> and wrote extensively on the caves.<sup>3</sup> Many scholars have written on the caves,<sup>4</sup> the most exhaustive effort being that of G. Yazdani in the nineteen thirties, forties and fifties.<sup>5</sup>

While the excavation of caves at Ajanta is more or less universally accepted as beginning before the Christian era, the date of completion of all the caves is a subject of great debate. It is clear that Caves X and IX are the earliest, and according to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Cave X could have been excavated in the second century BC, while Cave IX could have been excavated in the first century BC.<sup>6</sup> Walter Spink, a longstanding scholar of these caves, believes Cave IX to be the earliest—falling in the first century

*Facing page:*

10 Kerala, Padmanabhapuram Palace Temple—Krishna playing the flute for the *gopis*, detail of Fig. 154







BC—and Cave X to have been excavated in the first century AD.<sup>7</sup> The ASI dates Caves I, II, IV, VI, VII, XI, XV, XVI, XVII, XIX, XX, XXVI to the Vakataka period. The caves with paintings are I, II, IX, X, XVI and XVII, while VI has a few remnants. There is, however, a great deal of controversy about the exact period of excavation and painting of the Vakataka caves. Spink believes that, with the exception of Caves IX and X, the caves were painted during the reign of King Harisena of the Vatsagulma branch of the Vakatakas, which he believes started in AD 460 and was over well before AD 480. According to Spink within these two decades at best, Caves I, II, XVI and XVII were excavated as well as painted, and Caves VI, VII, XI, XV, XX and XXVI excavated and their massive sculptures created.<sup>8</sup> Karl Khandalavala, an eminent Indian scholar, however, believes that all this activity took place between AD 482 to 530, thus spreading the great creative effort to a period of nearly 50 years.<sup>9</sup> It has to be appreciated that throughout his reign Harisena was busy marching his armies over a vast terrain, stretching from the Arabian Sea in Gujarat to Kalinga or Orissa in the east. He was not a Buddhist himself and hence there would have been no imperial assistance for the excavation of so many caves during his reign or the execution of wall paintings in five of them. The work involved was so massive in nature as to have required the employment of a large number of laborers, carvers, sculptors and painters which a minister preoccupied with other duties, because his king was always away, could not have accomplished in such a short period. Furthermore, there were no big cities nearby to provide the necessary workers or their food supplies. The artistic effort here probably spread from the second or first centuries BC to the second quarter of the sixth century AD.<sup>10</sup>

The patronage of the caves at Ajanta was done during the period of the Satavahanas and the Vakatakas. The Satavahanas rose in first century BC and had an extensive kingdom by the time of Gautami Putra Satkarni (AD 108–130), extending over Maharashtra, parts of Madhya Pradesh and the northern districts of Karnataka. Their rule seems to have declined from the third century AD.<sup>11</sup>

The Vakatakas rose with the decline of the Satavahanas. Their ruler Prithvisena (AD 355) got his son married to the daughter of Chandragupta II, Prabhavati Gupta, which indicates his power and influence. The greatest glory of the Vakatakas was achieved during the reign of Harisena (AD 480–510)<sup>12</sup> due to his military exploits. The extent of his kingdom<sup>13</sup> led Walter Spink to claim that he was the greatest ruler of the world.<sup>14</sup>

The Satavahanas and the Vakatakas were Hindu dynasties and were not the patrons of the Ajanta paintings, funds for which came from Buddhist devotees and aristocrats and state officials. The Buddhist laity was well established here by this time, as Buddhism seems to have arrived here from Mauryan times. The Third Buddhist Council, held during Ashoka's time, had made a decision to send a *sthavira*, elder, named Dharmarakshita to Suparaka, a famous port town nearby—and his efforts seem to have borne some fruits.

Dieter Schlingoff<sup>15</sup> has identified the exact texts illustrated at Ajanta. These include the *Mahaparinirvana*, claimed both by the Hinayana and the Mahayana sects, the *Samyukta Nikaya*, *Dhammaka Sutra*, *Jatakas*, and the *Mahasamaj Sutra*, all written in the second century BC. Ashvagosh's *Lalitvistara*, written during the period of Kanishka in the first

Facing page:  
11 Ajanta caves—an overview



century AD, his *Saundarananda*, and the *Kalpanamanditka* written during this period were claimed by the Mahayana sect.<sup>16</sup> Though both the Hinayana and the Mahayana seem to have been present, it is the latter that appears to have had the major influence, a fact indicated also by sculptures of Boddhisattvas.

The military prowess and long reigns of the Satavahanas and the Vakatakas provided political stability to the region and created an economic resource base rich enough to sponsor a great deal of artistic endeavor, including the excavation of 800 caves during the Satavahana period, and the beautiful Satavahana- and Vakataka-period sculptures and the terracotta art of Ter.

Most human settlements were based on agriculture, as indicated by archaeological excavations.<sup>17</sup> Large irrigation tanks and dams were constructed during this period.<sup>18</sup> Royalty and the feudatories gave land grants to Brahmins, monks and others like merchants and traders, which further promoted agriculture. There was not a high degree of pressure on land, though a large percentage of black soil was cultivated.<sup>19</sup> Market towns came into existence on the national route from the northern plains to the southern peninsula—like Amravati, Bhattiprolu, Chandavaram, Jaggayapeta, Nagarjunkonda in the eastern Deccan and Paithan, Kondapur, Hyderabad, Kottigale, Nasik, Bhokardan and Paunni. These towns absorbed agricultural surpluses. The existence of thirty ports<sup>20</sup> and of forts<sup>21</sup> further strengthened that stability. Above all, the impetus Buddhism gave to trade meant further prosperity through internal and external trade. It was earlier believed that the existence of Roman remains at Arikamedu indicated that a colony of Roman merchants lived there. This itself is now contested because bronze and beads believed to have been of Roman origin are now thought to have been locally manufactured.<sup>22</sup> The *Periplus* mentions, "Immediately beyond Barygaza [Broach] the coast runs from north to south. Thus the region is called Dachinabades... Of the trading center of the region of Dachinabades; two are most outstanding, Paithana and Tagara. From Paithana large quantities of onyx and from Tagara large quantities of cloth are sent to the ports. The local ports of this area are Akabaerru, Suppara and the city of Kalliena." The items of export from India included iron and steel, cotton cloth, cotton garments, lac die, rhinoceros horn—which was used for making oil flasks, myrrh, tin, cinnamon, incense, ghee, aloe, pearls, tortoise shell, bdellium, lard, costus, indigo, lapis lazuli, agate, monkeys, and transparent gems.<sup>23</sup> Western Indian inscriptions mention Yavanas giving donations to monuments.<sup>24</sup> The Sangam literature of 100 BC–AD 250 mentions Yavanas coming with gold and wine in their ships and returning with pepper.<sup>25</sup> Trade in agricultural commodities, and spices, pearls and clothes definitely existed but its quantum cannot be fully determined as yet. It must, however, have contributed to Indian prosperity.

Painting in Ajanta seems to have started in the second century BC when, according to most scholars,<sup>26</sup> Cave X was excavated. An inscription in the cave states that Buddhist monks donated the money for excavation. Some of its original paintings have deteriorated to an extent that makes them completely unidentifiable. What remains are stunning paintings of the Buddha on simple unornamented pillars. On one of the walls, a Buddha with the gentlest of expressions, wearing a long yellow robe covering only one shoulder sits on a simple stone seat (Fig. 12).





Most of the paintings in Cave IX, which is dated by some to the first century BC and by others to first century AD, have also been destroyed. Here too, only figures of Buddha on pillars are noticeable, painted in the simplest of styles and, like in Cave X, without any ornamentation.

Cave XVI's excavation was undertaken by Varahamihira, the chief minister of Harisena, the Vakataka king.<sup>27</sup> Some of the best sequences are painted in this cave. The most significant composition is the story of Nanda's conversion by Buddha. A panel illustrates Buddha's visit to his stepbrother Nanda's home to make him a monk (Fig. 13). In another panel a disconsolate Nanda sits in front of a barber who also looks unhappy after cutting off Nanda's hair (Fig. 14). A third panel concerned with Nanda's conversion has a superb representation of a fainting princess (Fig. 15). It illustrates the legend described in Ashvaghosha's epic *Saundarananda*. It depicts Mahajanapada Kalyani, Nanda's beautiful new bride, swooning at receiving the news of her husband's renunciation; although, according to Ashavaghosha, she did not swoon but screamed like a wounded animal.<sup>28</sup> This painting is extraordinary for the way the fainting figure is lying recumbent, supported

Left:

12 Ajanta, Cave X—Buddha

Right:

13 Ajanta, Cave XVI—Buddha's visit to Nanda's palace





14 Ajanta, Cave XVI—Nanda sitting forlorn in front of his barber

by the arms of her attendants. There are also an illustration of the *Maha Ummagga Jataka* and a few figures of angels flying in the air.

Cave XVII is profusely illustrated and perhaps the best preserved of all the caves with paintings. It has a unique conceptual design covering every inch of space, including the ceiling, which testifies to the resources of its patron—a feudatory king of Rishika<sup>29</sup> named Upendra Gupta—who had the cave excavated in memory of his dead brother.

The walls and ceiling of the cave's veranda, the dimensions of which are 64 feet wide and 64 feet deep, are covered with paintings. While the ceiling has a simple circle with human figures inside it, the walls contain a multiplicity of themes, most of which are still well preserved. On the left wall of the veranda is painted the first "wheel of life" painting in India (Fig. 16). The Vinaya texts prescribe the manner in which such a painting should be executed in monastic establishments. The *Divyavadana*, for example, states that the wheel should paint the five forms of existence, with life in hell, life in the animal world, and the life of ghosts in the lower parts of the wheel, and gods and human beings in the upper half. Passion in the form of a turtledove, hate as a snake and delusion as a pig should be depicted in the center of the wheel. The painting is not fully decipherable but we can see the gods enjoying a performance of music and dance. To the left of the gods is the world of the *asuras*, demons. The painting of the human world is damaged, but we can see a few men conversing and parts of the animal world.



The most remarkable illustration in the front veranda is from the *Vessantara Jataka*. It tells of the generosity of Vessantara, the son of King Sanjay who was exiled for his generosity and was then returned to his kingdom by Indra. This great tale of liberality and charity is depicted in a lyrical and linear narration style in the veranda as well as inside the cave. The paintings show the announcement of exile, the procession approaching his parents' palace, the grief-stricken queen, and various spectators and attendants (Figs. 17–20). The artist has succeeded in depicting great movement in this painting by stationing the human figures on a sloping plane with sloping trees in the background. There is also great pathos in it. An adjacent panel shows Indra with *yakshas* and *yakshis* flying in to pay homage to the prince (Fig. 21). One of the most beautiful figures painted in Ajanta is a dark-complexioned, turbaned *apsara* (Fig. 3). Inside the cave are representations of Jujuke bringing the children of Vessantara and Madri to King Sanjay for sale. The public's remorse over this tragedy and the recall and the crowning of Vessantara as the king soon follow. Above the doors of the veranda are simple figures of Buddha in austere robes. Above these are images of couples seated in their homes, mostly conversing and drinking wine (Fig. 22).

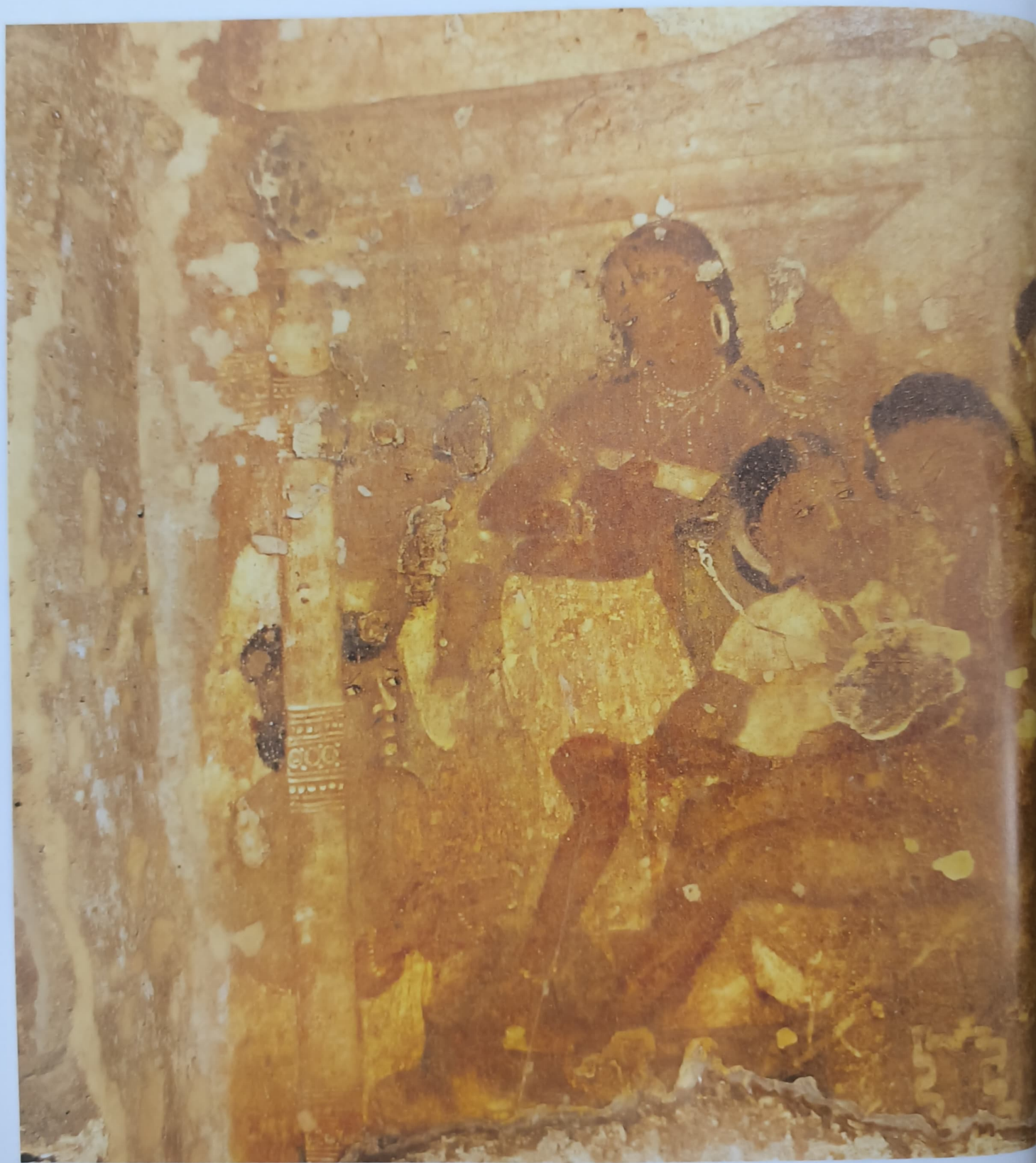
The most profusely illustrated subjects in Cave XVII, however, depict animals as their heroes. The world that the artists of Ajanta inherited was most compassionate to animals, endowing them with human qualities of generosity, liberality, tolerance, compassion and wisdom. In fact, most of the animal characters were supposed to represent former Bodhisattvas. The exception is the *Nilgiri Jataka*, the story of the evil elephant sent by Devadatta to kill Buddha.

The story of the *Shadanta Jataka* is depicted inside the cave with great poignancy and sensitivity. The story tells how the queen of Varanasi ordered the killing of an elephant—the reincarnation of the elephant king Shadanta, her husband in an earlier life—to avenge a slight. When the hunter fulfils his task and brings back the head of the elephant, the queen dies of remorse. The most poignant scene depicts the hunter's remorse, as he sits near an empty tank, over the fact that his act has brought famine to the land (Fig. 23). Another painting in this cave depicts the *Matripooshaka Jataka*, the story of a Bodhisattva elephant tenderly caring for his mother.

The *Hamsa Jataka* narrates the story of a Bodhisattva who was born as a goose and lived on Mount Chitrakuta as the king of a flock of geese. He was taken to Varanasi to preach to Queen Khema following her dream that she heard the divine law, *dharma*, preached by a golden goose. There is a graphic illustration of the goose flying away after his sermon (Fig. 24).

Two paintings illustrate two separate *Mahakapi Jatakas*. In one, a king seduced by the taste of a delicious mango invades the forest to take possession of<sup>30</sup> the tree and orders his troops to take the tree from the monkeys enjoying its mangoes. The monkey king orders the monkeys to leave the tree, jumping to the other side of the river and stretching himself to become a bridge for them (Fig. 25). The king in remorse then forbids the killing of monkeys in his kingdom. In the second illustration, a Bodhisattva monkey rescues a man from a well, only to be attacked by him with a stone (Fig. 27). The *Mahesh Jataka*









15 Ajanta, Cave XVI—Nanda's wife, Princess Mahajanapada Kalyani, fainting on receiving the news of Nanda's renunciation







is the story of the Boddhisattva who was born as a buffalo. A naughty and arrogant monkey used to sit on his back but the Boddhisattva ignored his pranks. One day the monkey tried the same trick on another buffalo, who threw him to the ground, thus indicating the fall of arrogance (Fig. 26).

There are two illustrations with Boddhisattva deer as their heroes. In the *Mriga Jataka*, the golden deer saves the life of a drowning man but is betrayed by him. The ungrateful man reveals the deer's secret hideout to the king, which leads to the deer being captured. The golden deer is depicted being brought by the king of Varanasi to his court at his wife's request (Fig. 28). The king and his escorts look very young and robust while the golden skin of the deer being brought back in a chariot is still glistening after the lapse of sixteen centuries. In an illustration of the *Nigrodhamika Jataka* the king bans the hunting of deer after a Boddhisattva deer offers himself for the king's table.

The last illustration on the theme of animals is a chilling depiction of the *Sutasoma Jataka*. This tells the story of Saudasa, a child presented by a lioness to a king as being his, conceived by kissing his feet while he was asleep. The king accepts the child and raises him as his own, and the child is eventually crowned king (Fig. 29), but his cannibalistic tendencies lead to his destruction.

There are also paintings of scenes from the life of Buddha. There is a remarkable composition depicting the Buddha's visit to his father's palace after his enlightenment. Yashodhara, his beautiful wife, in all her adornment, comes to the palace door with her young son Rahul to welcome him back home. When they see him in monk's robes they are grief-stricken. Yashodhara tells Rahul to ask his father for his inheritance, but the Buddha only stretches out his alms bowl (Fig. 30). The large size of the Buddha is meant to indicate that he has a larger role in the world, beyond the claims of his household. This depiction of the story from the *Mahavagga* is one of the masterpieces of the cave.

Buddha is also illustrated preaching to his mother Mahamaya and others in Tushita Heaven, to kings, commoners and foreigners in this world, and performing the miracle of Sravasti by multiplying himself.

Another story depicted is that of the Boddhisattva king Sibi, renowned for his generosity. Sakka, the lord of heaven, asks for the gift of his eyes, and is given them immediately. He then restores the king's eyes and blesses him. The painting shows Sibi sitting in his palace while beggars carry away the gifts he has given them (Fig. 31). The painting is impressive in its depiction of light, created through the use of different shades of yellow. The story of *Simhalavadana Jataka*, in which King Simhala is stranded with 500 merchants on an island inhabited by ogresses who devour their victims, is graphically illustrated—with depictions of an overloaded ship, the island of ogresses, an ogress visiting King Simhala and being invited to join his harem (where she is shown devouring the harem), Simhala escaping on the Boddhisattva horse Behala and finally coming back to conquer the island. The painting depicts movement very well (Fig. 32).

Finally we come to an exquisite queen, the epitome of pride, grace, beauty and elegance, holding a mirror and accompanied by her maids (Fig. 33). The artists have

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16 Ajanta, Cave XVI—The wheel of life





**17** Ajanta, Cave XVII—Prince Vessantara and Princess Madri after giving away their possessions

*Facing page:*

**18** Ajanta, Cave XVII—King Sanjay consoling his wife









*Above:*

**19** Ajanta, Cave XVII— King Sanjay's attendants peeping out of the palace window, detail of Fig. 17

*Below:*

**20** Ajanta, Cave XVII—The queen's concerned nurse, detail of Fig. 18





painted her in such a way that the early light of day falls on her face. The ceiling and the veranda of Cave XVII have been beautifully painted with animals and graceful floral designs, depicting movement.

Cave I and II are supposed to have the latest paintings done in Ajanta and probably date to the sixth century AD. Cave I depicts scenes from the life of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. Three depictions of Buddha are masterpieces. One shows Buddha's temptation by Mara. The other show Buddha figures almost as portraits. In one of these is the Avalokiteshvara Buddha (Fig. 34), gorgeously bejeweled and attired, with smaller females painted near him and a male attendant in the upper left corner. Some scholars consider this figure to be a representation of the Vajrapani Buddha, but this seems doubtful as the Vajrapani Buddha should have some symbol of a *vajra*, a lightning bolt, associated with him—whereas this figure has no such symbol. His half-closed eyes, posture, broad shoulders and *abhaya mudra*, gesture of fearlessness, indicate that he is unaffected by the beauty around him and by his own rich apparel but is content to bless the universe. He epitomizes the Avalokiteshvara Buddha.

A large image of the benevolent Padmapani Buddha, painted close to the Avalokiteshvara Buddha, is grand in a different way (Fig. 35). He wears a less ornate crown and very few jewels, yet he is handsome. His beauty comes from his controlled and powerful musculature and the complete equanimity of his face, a serenity and strength unparalleled elsewhere. The characters surrounding the Padmapani Buddha are equally well delineated. The watchful expression of the Buddha's dark-complexioned guard to his left, and the guard's expressive hand *mudra* are in striking contrast to the Buddha (Fig. 36). To the right of the Buddha is another attendant in princely attire. To the left of the second attendant is the head of a dark-complexioned princess wearing a crown, who is stunningly beautiful and elegant, yet looks sad (Fig. 37). This painting conveys tranquility and complete harmony, capturing a breathless moment in eternity that is contemplated by many aspirants on the spiritual path but rarely achieved. This feeling of spiritual equanimity has never again been achieved in Indian painting—the closest in terms of excellence of expression is the sculpted figure of the Sarnath Buddha.

This cave also contains illustrations of a few *Jataka* tales. The best-preserved panels illustrate the *Mahajanaka Jataka*. Mahajanaka was a merchant who won the heart of Shivali, a princess of Mithila, by winning a contest set up by her father. He subsequently became the king of Mithila, with Shivali as his queen. As a king, Mahajanaka soon lost interest in the luxurious worldly life and wanted to renounce the world. The panels illustrating this theme depict Mahajanaka discussing the issue of his renunciation with the queen, while the attendants listen to the idea with fearful expressions (Fig. 38). The queen tries to dissuade her husband from leaving by arranging a beautiful dance performance to distract him (Fig. 39). The king, however, leaves the court on an elephant, escorted by his men (Fig. 40). He is then illustrated bathing, with a number of attendants pouring water over his head (Fig. 41). His maids—some of whom are naked—and the male attendants have very sad expressions while Mahajanaka looks serene and at peace (Fig. 42). The beckoning figure of a holy man can be seen through one of the doors (Fig. 43).





*Above:*

21 Ajanta, Cave XVII—Indra  
visiting Prince Vessantara to test  
his liberality

*Below:*

22 Ajanta, Cave XVII—A couple





This painting is remarkable not only for its narrative and expressive qualities, but also for the way space has been treated through the use of architectural forms. The architectural divisions of the king's palace, with the pavilion in which he discusses his idea of renouncing his kingdom, the dancers performing and finally the gateway from which the king and his courtiers emerge—all succeed in giving a feeling of space and movement to this painting.

The *Champeyya Jataka* is the story of the Naga king who was captured and brought to the court of King Uggrasena of Varanasi by a wicked Brahmin (Fig. 44). His queen Sumana pleads for his release at the court of Uggrasena. The cave also has another illustration from the *Sibi Jataka*, of Prince Sibi cutting his flesh to feed a hawk.

The next painting of importance is referred to by most scholars as the "Persian Embassy", and depicts a red-bearded aristocrat, his female companion and attendants. While it is true that there had been contact with Persians as early as the middle of the first millennium BC, there is no evidence of a Persian embassy to the Vakataka court. The physiognomy of the figures, including their red hair, suggests Greek or Roman visitors, rather than Persians. These figures could easily have been copied from live models of Yavanas—as the Greek and Roman traders were called (Fig. 45). There is a faintly decipherable painting of a shipwreck, which is supposed to represent the shipwreck of Prince Kalyanakaran.





23 Ajanta, Cave XVII—The repentant hunter of the *Shadanta Jataka*

Facing page:

24 Ajanta, Cave XVII—The Bodhisattva goose Dhritashtra flying away from the court of the king of Varanasi

The ceiling of the cave is covered with vertical and horizontal panels with floral designs and animals with the tenderest expression and movement.

Cave II, also excavated in the sixth century, may be one of the last caves to have been painted. Its most remarkable paintings deal with the life of Buddha taken from the *Mahavagga*, the *Buddha Charitra* and the *Lalitvistara*. A few indistinct panels of *arhats*, enlightened souls; *kinnars*, musicians of heaven; flying couples; a pot-bellied man and couples in their homes are painted over the door in the veranda, in horizontal rows.

The most extraordinary painting here concerns the birth of Buddha. In the first panel a dark Buddha is seen seated on a throne in Tushita Heaven, surrounded by gods, explaining his mission in being born in the world (Fig. 46). In the adjoining panel is a rather indistinct figure of Maya reclining on a couch and dreaming about a white elephant entering her body. She is then illustrated narrating her dream to her husband, the king, and in an adjacent panel reclining languorously against a pillar (Fig. 47). Then there is Maya looking at her large baby being held by three men, and a painting of votaries bringing gifts (Fig. 48). Two other panels also have realistic depictions of the Buddha, though the expressions are not as well done as those of Cave I. One of them has male and female devotees bringing him gifts, while the other has a pair of Buddhas; one assumes the *dharma chakra* posture, and the other holds his hands in the *abhay mudra* (Fig. 49). Another static and unremarkable panel has rows of Manushi Buddhas with various expressions (Fig. 50).

Another set of paintings depict the *Vidhur Pandita Jataka*, in which the Naga queen, Vimla, expresses her desire to hear a discourse on *dharma* from Vidhur Pandita, the

king of Indraprastha's minister. At the king's request, his daughter Indrati persuades the famous general Purnaka to bring the minister to his court (Fig. 51). Purnaka does this and the minister delivers his discourse to the king and his family (Fig. 52). The ceiling of Cave II is covered with floral and animal motifs of great beauty and rhythm, and *gandharvas* flying in the air. The colors of this ceiling are darker than similar ceiling designs painted in Cave I but they are equally rhythmical and lyrical.

Cave VI, believed to have been carved in the sixth century, also has a few paintings depicting Buddha's temptation by Mara. Figures of Buddha and doorkeepers can also be made out on both floors of this *vihara*.













*Facing page:*

**25** Ajanta, Cave XVII—The Mahakapi Bodhisattva counseling the denizens of the forest

*Above:*

**26** Ajanta, Cave XVII—An ungrateful man trying to kill the Bodhisattva monkey

*Below:*

**27** Ajanta, Cave XVII—The Bodhisattva Mahish and the arrogant monkey

*Following pages:*

*Page 48:*

**28** Ajanta, Cave XVII—The king of Varanasi setting out to bring Bodhisattva Mriga, the golden deer, to his court

*Page 49:*

**29** Ajanta, Cave XVII—Saudasa's anointment as king











The paintings and sculpture in Ajanta seem to be part of a conceptual whole. The artists of Ajanta are the initiators of the epic style of painting in which paintings stretch from one wall to another without disturbing the continuity of the story. The expansiveness of the paintings creates an impression of tremendous space, which helps the viewer to comprehend narrative sequence in compositions where very little attention has been paid to the chronological sequence. The artists also display excellent compositional skills, with the ability to pick up the essential parts of the story for depiction. They also succeed in communicating the Buddhist belief and value systems. There is great movement in most paintings. The limbs of the human figures are free-flowing, oceans are at high tide, deer and elephants run, and in the case of the most powerful Buddha figures like the Padmapani (Fig. 35) and Avalokiteshvara (Fig. 34), the stance is not static but indicates, rather, a palpable stillness close to movement.

The paintings have perfect balance. The central figure is always painted larger than the other characters, not only to indicate importance but also in order to show all the other figures converging toward him (Figs. 35, 38 and 39, for instance). Light within a painting is created through the use of yellow and through highlights on the face, especially the nose (Fig. 49).

Most of the caves have similar color schemes, though Cave XVI has a more prominent use of dark green than any of the others.

Finally, we come to the expression of Ajanta paintings. Most of these paintings represent Maharashtrian and Telugu ethnic types. The figures have thoughtful, serene and gentle expressions. The grace and the beauty of the figures are natural and in the Indian linear tradition. They were not created to evoke sensuousness or the joy of the pleasures of this world. The ample-bosomed women are by no stretch of the imagination erotic, they just represent the customary dress of women in the south and the Deccan, where women went about their business without wearing upper garments because of the hot and humid climate. They wore instead a number of necklaces to cover the chest.

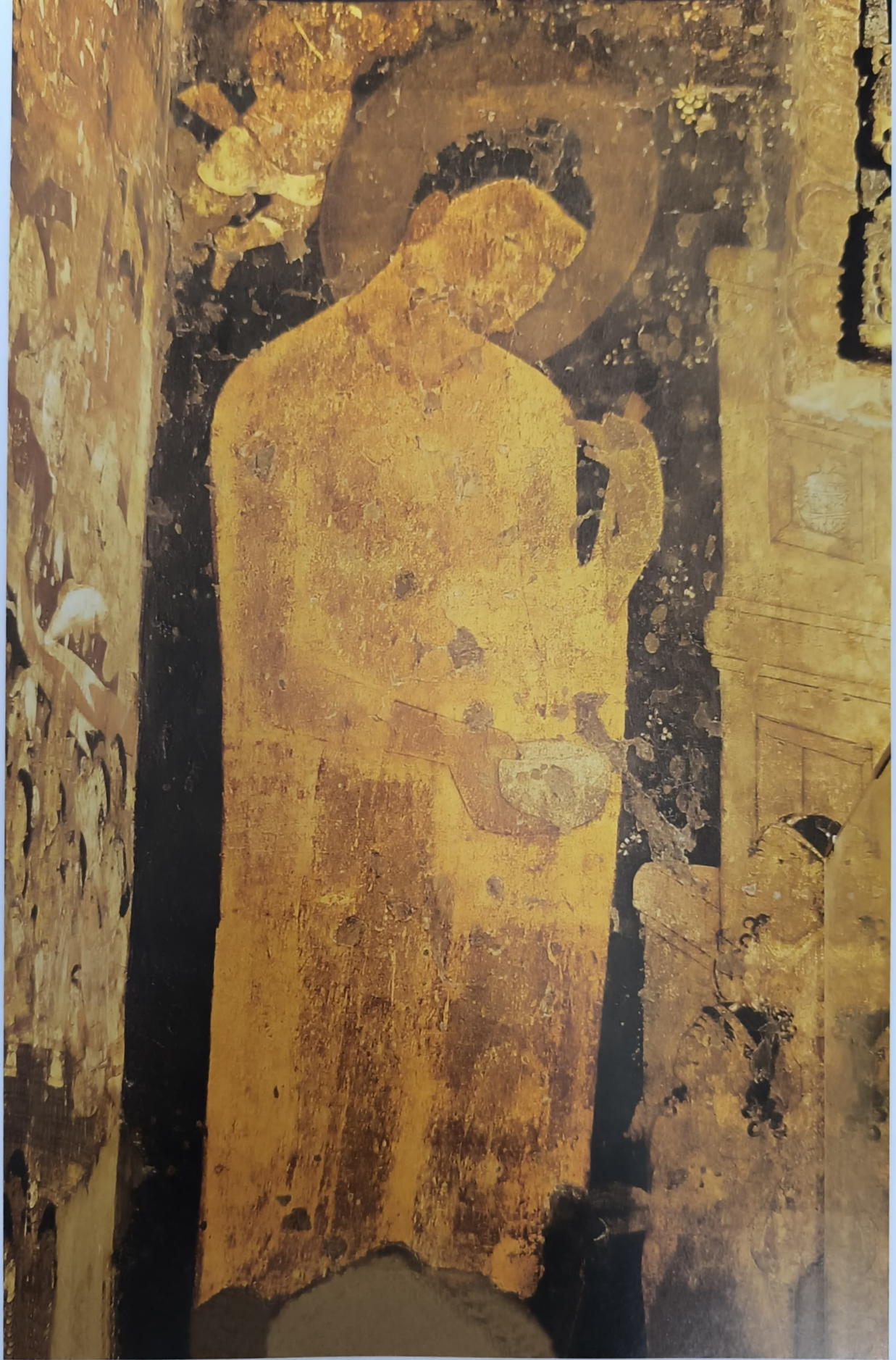
The artists strove for the Buddhist yogic equanimity of expression. They also strove to portray harmony and empathy both in their depiction of animals and of men and women of different social classes. The expressions on the faces of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva figures are relaxed, gentle and serene; they have great dignity but are approachable. They exude compassion and succor for all beings and are not stern, unapproachable, unattainable icons of godhood.

The depiction of nature is rather limited in Ajanta painting. The few trees in Caves XVI and XVII are naturalistic, including trees like the areca nut, which do not grow in the region. The rocks on the other hand are rather stylized. Architecture, which is the main backdrop of many paintings, is realistically depicted and used to create impressions of space. The compositions in the caves excavated circa the first century BC are simple, but increase in complexity by the time of the painting of Caves I, II and XVII. The canvas of thematic illustrations gets enlarged and the grouping and subgroupings of many episodes combined together increases. The line and the coloring also keep changing.

*Facing page:*

**30** Ajanta, Cave XVII—Gautam Buddha begging alms from his wife Yashodara and son Rahul













The line in Caves IX and X is strong and bold but it becomes too linear by Cave XVII. It may also be pointed out that sometimes the quality of painting varies in the same cave—as in the paintings of the Avalokiteshvara and Padmapani figures (Figs. 34 and 35) in Cave I as compared to the thicker line and rather squat figures of the illustrations of the *Mahajanaka Jataka* episode in the same cave. It must be said however, to the credit of the artists of Ajanta, that they maintained the expressive qualities of this school of painting down to the last cave. Some of the most expressive paintings, like that of the Padmapani Buddha in Cave I, were painted at the very last stages of their creativity.

We have next to no knowledge about the artists of the Ajanta paintings. Due to the remoteness of the place and its distance from urban centers, it is likely that the artists came from all over the Vakataka territories and the Satavahana empire. We do not have any inscriptional or literary evidence that these artists belonged to any guilds. There is a solitary inscriptional reference in Cave XV to a *sutradhara* who may have been a master builder.<sup>31</sup> Whether the *sutradhara* conceived the design of the paintings is not known. The complexity and finesse of design indicates the participation of learned monks in

*Facing page:*

**31** Ajanta, Cave XVII—People receiving gifts from King Sibi

*Above:*

**32** Ajanta, Cave XVII—Ogresses in *Simhalavadana*

*Following pages:*

*Page 54:*

**33** Ajanta, Cave XVII—A queen looking at herself in the mirror

*Page 55:*

**34** Ajanta, Cave I—Dhyani Buddha Avalokiteshvara

















*Facing page:*

**35** Ajanta, Cave I—Padmapani Buddha

*Above left:*

**36** Ajanta, Cave I—One of Padmapani's guards, detail of Fig. 35

*Above right:*

**37** Ajanta, Cave I—A dark princess, detail of Fig. 35









the selection of themes for depiction. The spiritual quality of the paintings further indicates that the artists were deeply steeped in the Buddhist philosophy as well as the folklore of the *Jatakas*.

As mentioned earlier, the paintings in Ajanta are the result of a conceptual design. Both the sculptures and the paintings have thematic parallels. Some themes are exact replicas, like the sculpted Buddhas in rows in Cave VII also painted in Cave II, Buddha visiting his ancestral palace and putting forward his bowl to ask alms from his son (Fig. 30), and the dimensions of the figure sculpted on the entrance to Cave XIX and also painted in Cave XVII. In certain instances there are planned interactions with sculpture—for example, the vines around the Buddha figures are painted on the walls when left unfinished on the sculptures. In still other cases, as in Cave XVII, there are sculptures and paintings of Buddha figures in rows on the doorway that leads from the veranda to the interior of the cave. It must also be pointed out that on entry, the first impression

*Facing page:*

**38** Ajanta, Cave I—Mahajanaka informing Queen Shivali of his desire for renunciation

*Above:*

**39** Ajanta, Cave I—Dancers in Mahajanaka's palace









is made by the solid sculptures on the façade, and the excellence of the paintings is striking only after entering the *viharas*. On moving toward the end of the cave and the sanctum sanctorum, where the main Buddha figure is installed, the impact of sculpture takes over. The two traditions of sculpture and painting thrived side by side and represent contemporary aesthetic concepts.

It may also be pointed out that although most of the paintings are based on the legends of Buddha's life and the *Jatakas*, they do not always literally follow the stories, as the artists chose incidents capable of visual representation.

*Facing page:*

**40** Ajanta, Cave I—Mahajanaka leaving his palace apartment

*Above left:*

**41** Ajanta, Cave I—Mahajanaka's bath before his renunciation

*Above right:*

**42** Ajanta, Cave I—The attendants of King Mahajanaka











*Previous pages:*

*Page 62, above:*

**43** Ajanta, Cave I—A *bhikshu* waiting to escort Mahajanaka

*Page 62, below:*

**44** Ajanta, Cave I—Bodhisattva Champeyya in Uggrasena's court

*Page 63, above:*

**45** Ajanta, Cave I—The Yavanas

*Page 63, below:*

**46** Ajanta, Cave II—Buddha in Tushita Heaven



*Above:*

**47** Ajanta, Cave II—Queen Maya reclining against a pillar

*Below:*

**48** Ajanta, Cave II—Votaries bringing offerings for the Buddha after his birth

*Facing page:*

*Above:*

**49** Ajanta, Cave II—Buddhas

*Below:*

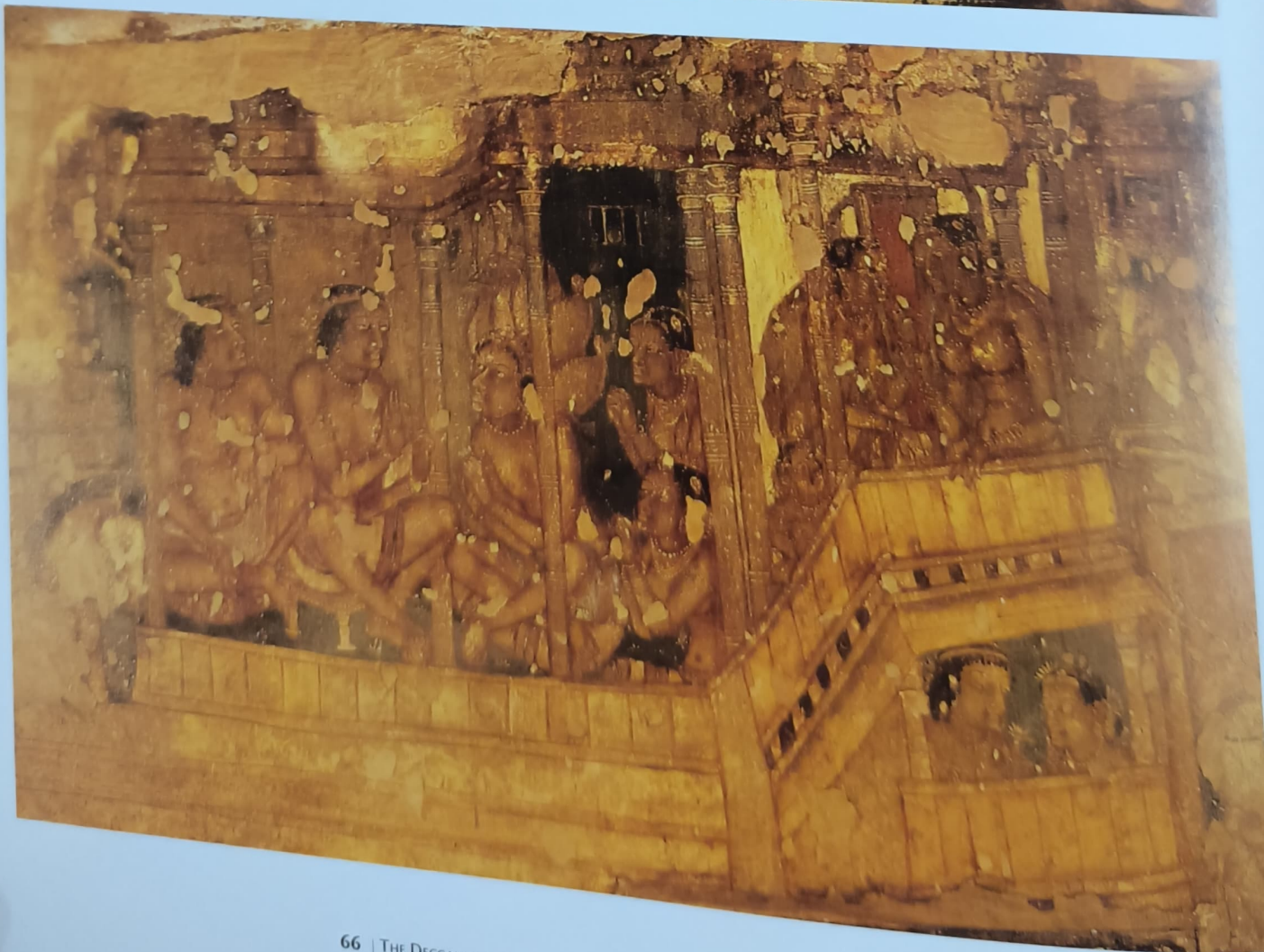
**50** Ajanta, Cave II—Manushi Buddhas













## BAGH

Hundreds of Buddhist, Hindu and Jain caves were excavated in the Deccan. The nine caves of Bagh, which lie 90 miles from Mhow, a small town in Madhya Pradesh, are close to the Deccan belt of caves. Most scholars believe<sup>32</sup> that they were excavated at the same time as those of Ajanta. Caves IV and V at Bagh still have a few extant paintings and were carved out at the same times as Caves XVI and XVII of Ajanta. In these caves also, as in Ajanta, painting and sculpture form integral parts of a conceptual whole.

A 220-feet long veranda in front of Caves IV and V is covered with wall paintings. Most of these paintings have disappeared with only a head or arm visible in some of them. The ASI has also removed some paintings in order to preserve them. Earlier archaeologists who had seen the complete veranda in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have left complete records of these paintings.<sup>33</sup> It appears that there was one major composition, which consisted of a long processional scene with elephants and mahouts, and groups of spectators. This painting shows a procession on elephants with their mahouts. Groups of people standing or sitting near the pathway watch the procession (Figs. 53 and 54). Four such groups have been identified as consisting of men and women sitting around playing on musical instruments, or in serious conversations. Some of them appear to be extremely serious, which may be due to the procession, perhaps celebrating a religious occasion. It appears that most of the characters painted are secular figures. The painting is remarkable for its expressive quality of seriousness. The drawing and the musculature of figures are not as powerful as in the Cave XVI and XVII paintings of Ajanta. But the musculature and vibrancy of the figures of elephants is as powerful as at Ajanta. The colors are equally subtle. Considering the style of drawing, these paintings appear to be closer to Caves I and II than XVI and XVII of Ajanta. According to Nihar Ranjan Ray, the veranda also contained a painting, now lost, of a full-bodied *chauri* bearer, a woman carrying a fly-whisk.<sup>34</sup>

*Facing page:*

*Above:*

**51** Ajanta, Cave II—Princess Indrati on a swing

*Below:*

**52** Ajanta, Cave II—King Varuna and his family listening to Vidhura's discourse

*Below:*

**53 and 54** Bagh caves—Bystanders watching the procession



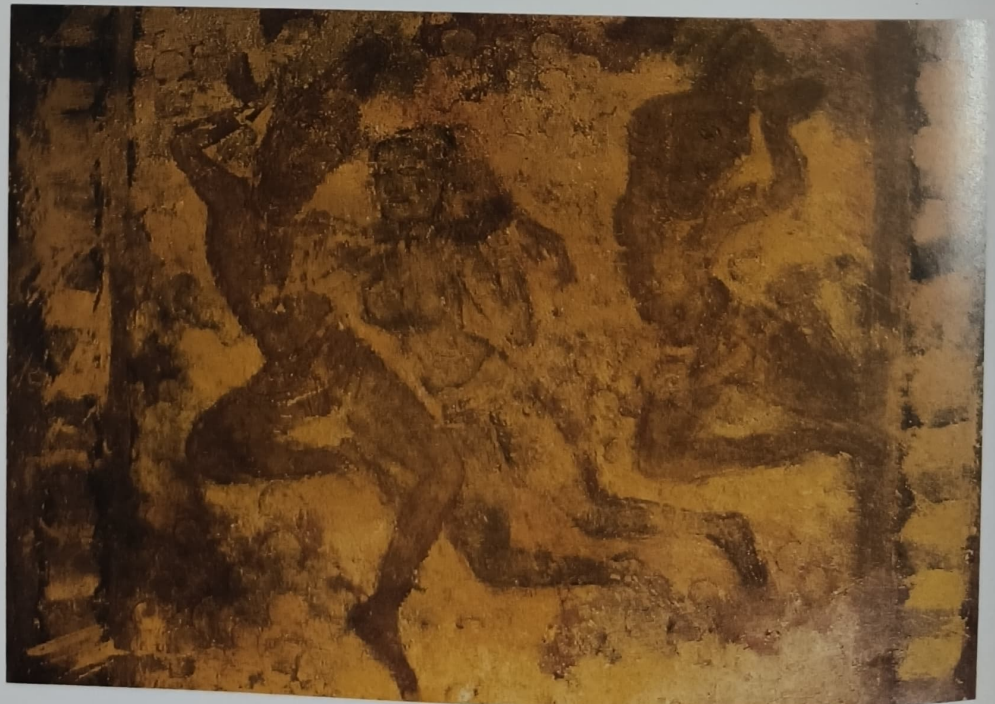


## BADAMI

We come next to the Badami caves, excavated by the powerful Chalukyas, who produced a line of illustrious rulers renowned both for their wealth and their valor. It appears that the caves at Badami were painted during the period of Kirtivarman (AD 566–597), the son of the great Pulakasin I who was a powerful presence all over South India because of his extensive wars and his subjugation of innumerable states. Caves II and III, which had paintings, are supposed to date from AD 578. Most of the paintings have become indecipherable. When these paintings were visible, figures of Shiva and Parvati could be seen, and they have been described as displaying warmth and delicacy of feeling and as being the product of a sophisticated urban culture.<sup>35</sup> They were also clearly in the same style as the paintings in the Buddhist caves we have discussed so far.

## ELLORA

The Rashtrakutas, who were originally from Andhra and who were the feudatories of the Chalukyas, overthrew them and became masters of the whole of present day Maharashtra by AD 753. Krishna I was the greatest warrior of this dynasty, which lasted until AD 975. Both Ellora, which lies in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra and has a complex of excavated caves, and the great Kailash Temple, built by Krishna I, have wall paintings. The temple is carved out of a rock from top to bottom. It is such an architectural marvel that the architect-builder, when he completed it, is supposed to have been awestruck by the immensity of his achievement. It is not only the architecture that inspires wonder but also the profusion of great sculptures of the most powerful male and female Hindu deities—of colossal size and extraordinary plasticity and expression. Its existence would



55 Ellora, Jain cave—Apsaras





have been implausible without the spiritual fervor that inspired it and the immense wealth that must have gone into its creation.

56 Ellora, Jain cave—Couples

The Rang Mahal, in front of the *garbhagriha*—literally, womb-house—the sanctum sanctorum containing the main image of Shiva, was covered with paintings. Scholars who visited the site in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could see an odd assortment of paintings, which some believe may have been added following the construction of the temple. These panels consist of Shiva dancing the Tandava (Fig. 2), a battle scene and a god riding a *sardula*, mythical beast.<sup>36</sup> As of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the only visible images are of a woman with flowers and some men on their mounts. Most of the colors have evaporated. The tradition seems to be the same as that of Ajanta but the quality of the modeling has deteriorated, and the line is thinner. The eyes have also become different from the Ajanta paintings.

Two caves in the Ellora complex of caves also have wall paintings. The first is Cave XXXII, which is a Jain cave with many distinct paintings. In front of the small shrine of Adinath in this cave we can make out many couples sitting together, dancers, *apsaras* (Fig. 55), and flowers painted in the *parikrama*, the circumambulatory passage. Most of the twenty-one distinct compositions are visible only in parts. The most complete painting is of a couple sitting close together (Fig. 56), the figures are lacking in vitality as well as modeling, and the color schemes appear to be in the tradition of Ajanta. Paintings have also been found in Cave XVI.



## TAMIL PAINTING

Tamil Nadu, the heart of Dravidian culture, was made up of small kingdoms right up to the sixth century. Large kingdoms rose here with the Pallavas in the seventh century. The Pandyas ruled in the Madura region and were in the ascendant for a short time after the Pallavas. The 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries belonged to the Cholas. The 13<sup>th</sup> century was a rather chaotic period with the Kadambas, Gangas, Hoysalas and Pandyas ruling over portions of Tamil Nadu. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Vijayanagara kings conquered Tondaimandalam. After the fall of the Vijayanagara kingdom in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Nayakas of this region became autonomous and ruled up to the middle of the next century and even later.

What is very interesting from the point of view of art history is the fact that all the rulers of Tamil Nadu were interested in the promotion of architecture, sculpture and painting. Unlike some North Indian states, the art of miniature painting does not seem to have developed here, though there is a continuous tradition of wall painting. The explanation lies perhaps in the fact that most arts were used for the glorification of the divine, in the creation of beautiful temples. Tamil Nadu is the land of temples, with temples both big and small dotting the entire countryside. Although literary references exist, even in Sangam literature and in early works like the *Silappadikaram* and the *Manimekalai*, to the existence of wall paintings in the large palaces of the kings and the lordly mansions of the nobility and the merchant class,<sup>37</sup> the surviving examples are to be found almost exclusively in temples.

There were many reasons for the patronage of art in Tamil Nadu, the most important being the extreme religiosity of the people of this region—due perhaps to their devotion to local religious cults, the continuance of which was ensured by arranging matrimonial relations within a radius of four to five kilometers, thus keeping the inheritance of property within a small area.<sup>38</sup> Though local cults were most powerful, Buddhism and Jainism were quite influential until the seventh and eighth centuries.<sup>39</sup> Classical Hinduism was also present, with the emergence of the Shaiva and Vaishnava cults from the beginning of the Christian era. Intense religious fervor was aroused by a number of poets and spiritualists, among whom Vishnu's devotees were known as the Alvars—Poyakiyalvar, Putattalvar, Periyalvar and his daughter Andal. The Shaiva saint poets were the Nayanmars, the most famous among them being Kulasekhara, Inriyana, Nathmuni, Madhur Kavi, Appar, Sambhandhar, Sundarar and Manikkavachakkar. Ascetics went from place to place and were revered, while religious *mathas* owned vast properties, produced religious literature, preached among the masses, and became facilitators of education.<sup>40</sup> The temples, richly endowed with land, money and jewelry from kings further aroused religious fervor, and also funded the creation of large sculptures and wall paintings—along with the king, aristocracy and even the general public.

The political stability provided by the rule of powerful dynasties and by a well organized system of provincial governors, district- and village-level functionaries brought peace and prosperity to this region. Considerable attention was given to agriculture, with the Pallavas and the Cholas constructing water tanks<sup>41</sup> and irrigation channels.<sup>42</sup> A



judicious system of revenue collection was devised. A great deal of encouragement was also given to the development of crafts, through the organization of groups of craftsmen—like weavers, jewelers, leather-workers, stone-cutters and other individual workers—into *nagarams*, guilds.<sup>43</sup> They looked after the quality of work and acted as lobbies for industries. Large conglomerations of production centers were concentrated near ports like Salem and Madura as centers for textiles.<sup>44</sup> Internal trade was encouraged due to increased militarization, which required a regular supply of goods to the large armies.<sup>45</sup> External trade was encouraged for the production of exportable surpluses, and trade links existed with Sri Lanka, Maldives and Southeast Asia. Textiles, saltpeter, iron and steel, diamonds, pearls, and sometimes slaves were exported.<sup>46</sup> Trade existed with China and Malaysia since the time of the Pallavas. Finally, social and literary renaissance encouraged and inspired the art of temple construction and wall painting here. From the time of the Cholas, the state took a direct interest in education by giving grants to colleges and schools. Local bodies like the *urs*, *sabhas* and *nagarams* also gave grants to such institutions. The result was the creation of an intellectual elite, which produced a vast body of literature both in Tamil and Sanskrit. The *Tevaram* and the *Tiruvasagam* and the bulk of the “four thousand” sacred hymns of the Tamil Vaishnava cannon belong to this period. The *Pandikkovai*, *Sutamani* and *Nandikkalampakam* were written during this period. Biographical literature like *Rajarajesvara Natakam* and *Rajaraja Vijayam* was written during the period of Rajaraja I. The subject of *Kulotunga Chola Charitai* of Tiruvanrayana Bhatt was Kolottunga I. The great Jain *mahakavya* *Sivakasindamani* of the Jain poet Tiruttakkadeva was composed in the ninth century and was one of the greatest *mahakavyas* of Tamil literature. The *Pingalandai* and *Chudamani* were two lexicons produced during this period. Kuttan, the Tamil poet, and Kamban, the author of the famous *Ramayanam*, were given fiefs by Chola rulers. The *Kulotungan Kovai* and *Tangaivanam Kovai* were the best-known works of secular literature. A great deal of literature on mythology and religious devotion was also produced. The *Periya Puranam* of Sekkilar and the *Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam* of Perumbarrappuli Nambi are the best-known works on Shaiva hagiology and legends. Of the works produced in this period the *Periya Puranam* was to have great influence on the lives of the Tamil Shaivas and on the selection of themes for wall paintings. Besides inspiring art with themes for literature, the Bhakti cult and education produced social advancement well ahead of the times.

There were less rigid caste distinctions in the Tamil Nadu society of the period, which enabled a large social sector to patronize art. Another significant element of Tamil Nadu social life was greater gender equality, which is visible through the large number of temples constructed by the Chola royal ladies and also through the donations to temples of land, jewelry and sculpture by important ladies, for which inscriptional evidence exists.<sup>47</sup>



## PALLAVA WALL PAINTING

Tamil Nadu wall paintings seem to exist from the seventh century onward—though literary mention of them exists from an earlier time. The Tamil classics, the *Manimekalai* and the *Silappadhikaram*, written in the fifth century AD, mention their existence. Remains of sculptures and temples from earlier dates have been found.

The Pallava monarch who first came to light as a great patron of art and architecture was Mahendra Varman I (AD 600–630), with appellations like “Vichitra Chitta”, curious one; “Chettakri”, temple builder; and “Chitrakarppulli”, a tiger among painters. He was responsible for introducing rock-cut cave structures and temples in Tamil Nadu. The cave at Mamandur, which has indistinct wall paintings, seems to have been carved during his time.<sup>48</sup> He also seems to have begun the work at Mahabalipuram. It was earlier believed that as he was a Jain he might have been the patron of the rock-cut temple of Adinath at Sittanavasal and its wall paintings. These have now been dated to the ninth century and will be discussed later.

The honor of being the patron of the best temple and the best Pallava wall paintings goes to Mahendra Varman’s great-grandson Narasimha Varman II (AD 700–720), who was also known as Rajasimha. Besides being a possessor of the martial qualities so essential for survival in those times, he was a great devotee of Shiva, and among his

57 Kanchipuram, Kailashnath Temple





favorite titles was that of "Shankarabhakta" or devotee of Shiva. He was fond of the scriptures, was very learned, and is reported to have been a great patron of scholars. Dandin and Bhasa, two famous litterateurs of his time received his patronage. The relative period of peace during his reign enabled him to patronize the visual and performing arts. Besides enjoying dance and music, the preference of most royals, he loved and was a patron of the theater.

He is acknowledged as the builder of the most beautiful temples of Kailashnath and Airavateshvara at Kanchi, the Talagirishvara at Panamalai, and the Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram.

The Kailashnath Temple at Kanchi reflects the tastes of a learned man, an aesthete and great devotee of Shiva (Fig. 57). The entire temple complex, the biggest of its kind until then, seems to have been conceived by a master architect. There is great synchronicity between the main shrine and the subsidiary shrines dedicated to Shiva, one of which was built by his talented queen, Rangapataka. Besides the great sculpture inside the temple, spellbinding large sculptures adorn all the *vimanas*, towers, of the temple on the southern, western, northern and eastern walls.

It is not known whether there were wall paintings in the interior of the main shrine but judging from the quality of the paintings available in the small shrines on the boundary wall, it is likely that this was the case. The small enclosures for water built along the *parikrama* wall around the temple also have mostly indistinct wall paintings. The few that remain can be found in Cells 23, 27, 26, 34, 41 and 43, and have illustrations of themes relating to Shiva—though not a single thematic depiction is intact. In one of them, Shiva's head—his powerful arm drawn in a dancing pose, and his attendants—the *ganas*, disciples or followers—can be deciphered (Figs. 58, 59 and 60). In Cell 41 a beautiful outline of the Somaskanda manifestation of Shiva, Parvati and their son Skanda can be seen on a terracotta background. Cell 26 contains only an outline of Shiva's figure, but dancing girls can be seen standing near him in all their bejeweled glory. A crowned queen wearing a lovely orange sari and blouse sitting near a ruler—the evidence of the latter being a strong male arm encircling the queen's shoulder—can be seen in one cell.

The Talagirishvara Temple at Panamalai, built by Narasimha Varman—though not as splendidly built and adorned as the Kailashnath Temple—has some beautiful wall paintings in a similar style. A painting of a female form—standing in the same pose as Mahamaya, the mother of Buddha, after giving birth to him—in Cave II of Ajanta, is supposed to represent Parvati watching the dance of Shiva<sup>49</sup> (Fig. 61). The delicate hands and leg with bended knee have achieved the same excellence as at Ajanta, though the expression on the face of the lady is far superior to the one at Ajanta. Another panel shows the figure of Shiva seated on a rock with a muscular arm and delicate hand *mudras*, revealing the typical excellence of the drawing and coloring seen at Kailashnath.

Annamalai Cave in a rocky hill in Malyambattu village, in the North Arcot district of Tamil Nadu, has Pallava period paintings on Jain themes. They have lakes full of lotuses encircled by scrolls with figures of ducks on them, similar to the cave temple at Sittanavasal.





*Above:*

**58** Kanchipuram, Kailashnath Temple—Head of Shiva

*Below:*

**59** Kanchipuram, Kailashnath Temple—Shiva Nataraja

*Facing page:*

*Above left:*

**60** Kanchipuram, Kailashnath Temple—The hand of Shiva, detail of fig. 51

*Above right:*

**61** Panamalai, Talagrishvara Temple—Parvati

*Below left:*

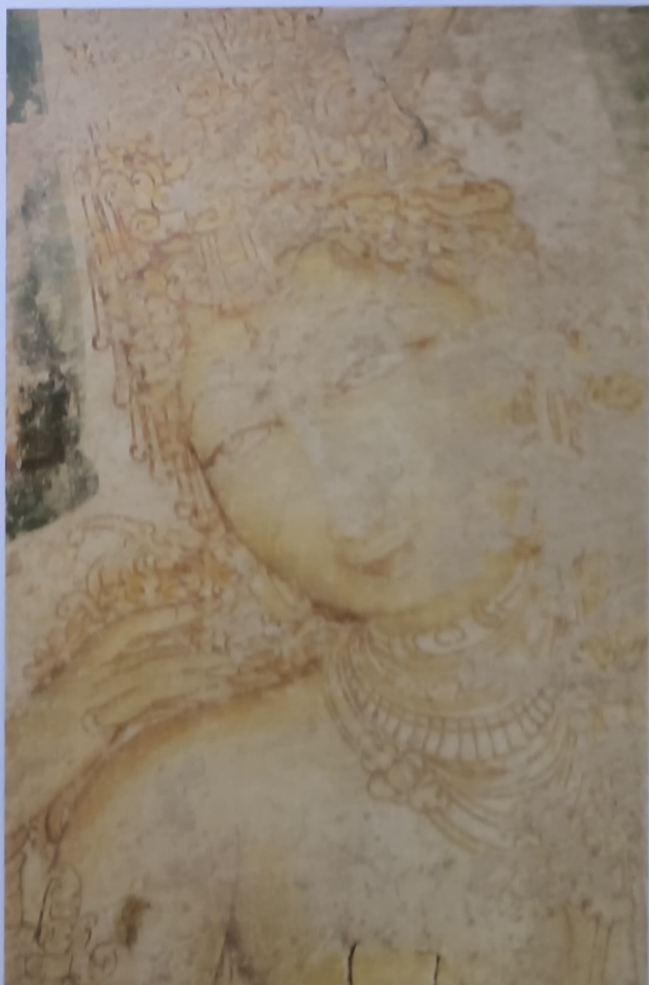
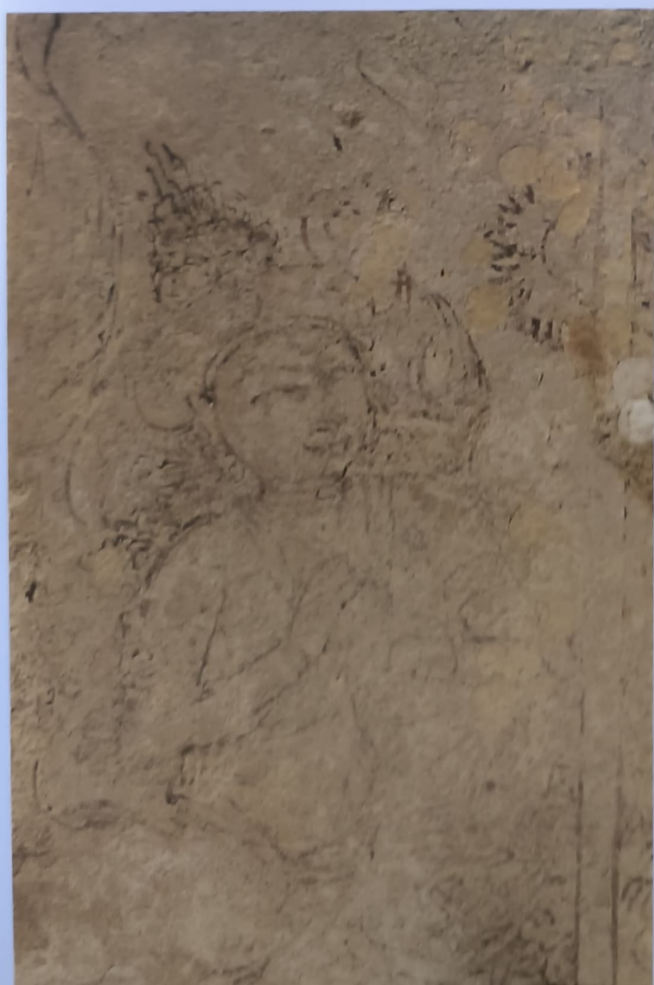
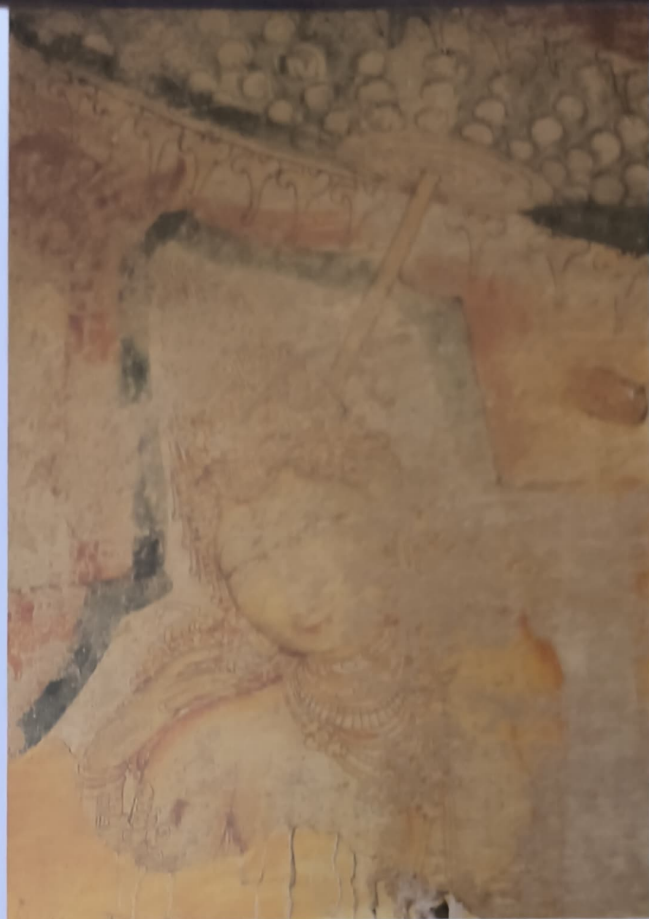
**62** Malyadipatti, cave temple—A royal figure

*Below right:*

**63** Malyadipatti, cave temple—A royal figure











64 Malayadipati, cave temple—  
Jain murtis

Besides this, two royal figures, crowned and ornamented and drawn in the most lyrical style (Figs. 62, 63) and a meditating Jain *muni*, sage, can also be seen (Fig. 64). The drawing and coloring appear to be delicate, sensitive and lyrical. The bodies are muscular, like those of the Kailashnath Temple in Kanchi. These paintings are supposed to have been done in the eighth century.<sup>50</sup> Malayadipati, a Vishnu temple in the Pudukkottai subdivision, is also supposed to have Pallava period wall paintings.<sup>51</sup>

### PANDYA WALL PAINTING

The Pandyas seem to have been the patrons of the next center of wall paintings. The Pandyas existed during the period of Ashoka and were at the zenith of their power in the seventh and eighth centuries under Arikesari Maravarman (AD 677–710).

The rock-cut Jain temple of Sittanavasal is now attributed to the Pandyas. It was earlier believed that this temple was carved out and painted during the reign of Mahendra Varman Pallava, a devout Jain, at the start of his career. This was the belief of C. Sivaramamurti. It is also believed that the temple was built by the Pallavas who first commissioned wall paintings there.<sup>52</sup> The paintings on the ceiling and the others were commissioned by the Pandyas when they became rulers of this area. C. K. Saraswati points out that a painted cloth canopy of similar design was supposedly painted in the early medieval





period.<sup>53</sup> The discovery of an inscription in the temple itself states that it was built in the ninth century and refers to the patronage of the Jain *acharya*, teacher, Ilan Gautam from Madura, who renovated and embellished the *ardhamandapa*, porch, and added a *mukhamandapa*, entrance hall.<sup>54</sup> It would be reasonable to assume that the embellishments mentioned in the inscriptions were actually purely decorative wall paintings.

The location of the temple is perfect for a spiritual center (Fig. 65). Centuries after it was built, it still opens up from a hilltop onto vast vistas of green land, where eternal silence prevails. The ceiling of the *ardhamandapa* of this temple is covered with paintings to emphasize the beauty of nature. Floral creepers, lotuses, birds, swans, a rare human face and arabesques constitute the harmonious whole that is nature (Figs. 66, 67). It appears that dancing figures originally existed here, and earlier scholars even noticed a royal couple and a canopy in textile designs, but now all that remains is what has just been described. A male figure (Fig. 68) and a dancer can still be deciphered. The masterly compositions have been painted by the artist in delicate lyrical lines and in subtle vegetal colors that impart a life all their own to the flowers and creepers. Paintings also existed in the Pandya style in the Jain cave temple of Tirumalaipuram, but nothing significant remains now.

65 Sittanavasal, cave temple

Following pages:

Page 78, above:

66 Sittanavasal, cave temple—  
The temple ceiling

Page 78, below:

67 Sittanavasal, cave temple—  
Lotuses on the ceiling

Page 79:

68 Sittanavasal, cave temple—  
A male figure











## CHOLA WALL PAINTING

The Cholas as a people are mentioned in Ashoka's rock-cut edicts, but as the rulers of Tondaimandalam they are first mentioned only in the first century BC. Vijayala Chola revived the family fortunes in the ninth century, and after the fratricidal conflict of the Pallavas in 869, the Pallava rule weakened, to be replaced by the Cholas who ruled until 1279.

This dynasty is responsible for taking temple architecture to its most glorious heights and for the building of over a thousand temples. It is still more famous for the extraordinary sculptures on the temple walls and the bronze sculptures installed within the temple interiors. The art of wall painting also seems to have flourished, though extant remains are visible in only two temples. Their quality attests to the sophistication and beauty of this art.

The first Chola temple with wall paintings is Vijaya Cholishwaram. It is a ninth century royal construction with the most beautiful setting of any Chola temple—on a large undulating rocky hill with an ethereal view of lakes, small hills, dry lands and wet rice lands surrounding the rocky formation (Fig. 69).

69 Vijaya Cholishwaram Temple





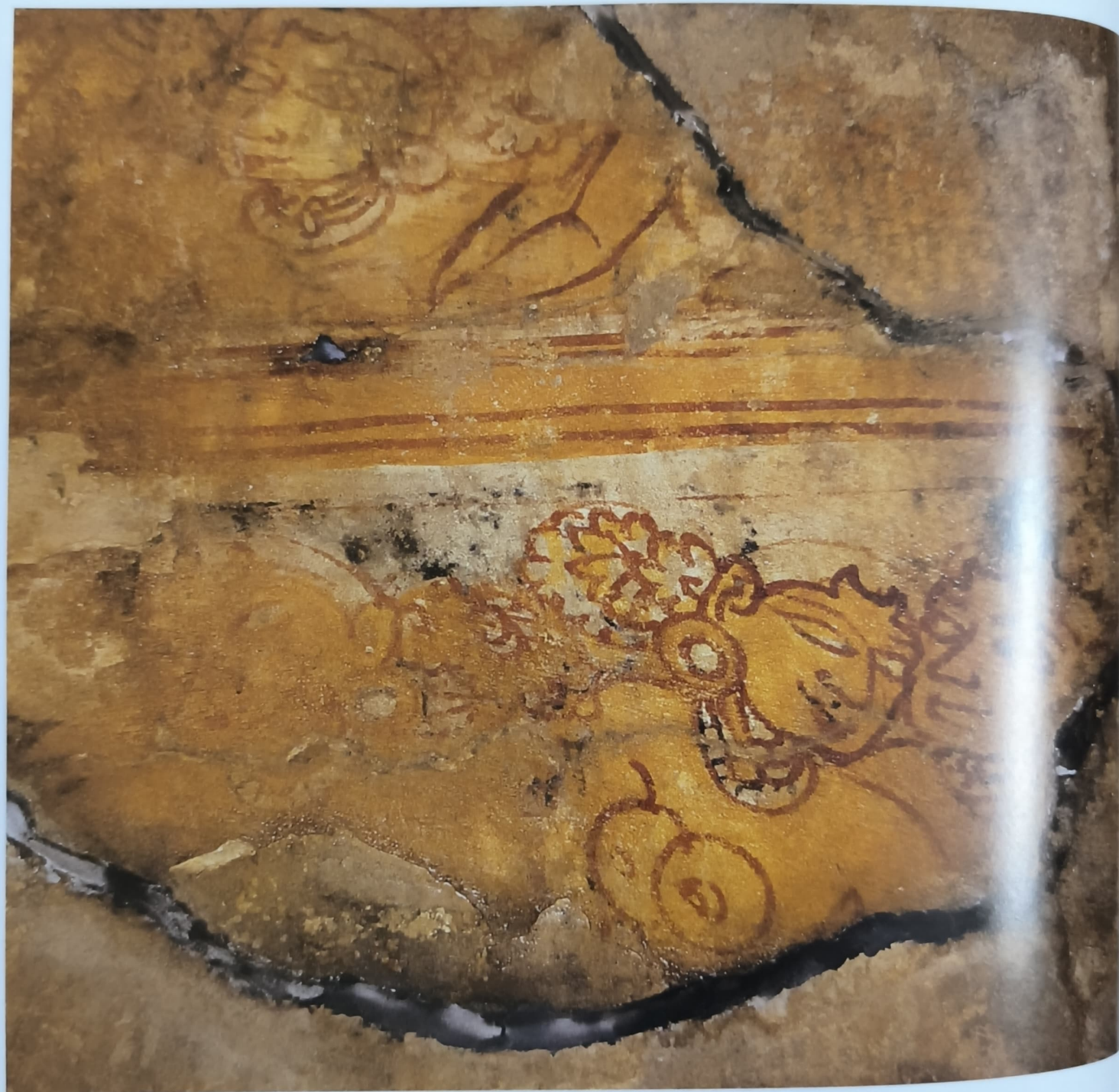
Though the temple is named after the Chola king Vijayalaya, an inscription dating to the second quarter of the ninth century—below the sculpture of the *dwarapala*, door-keeper, guarding the temple—states that it was constructed by Cattan Pudi alias Ilango Adiaraiyar, and that it was repaired and renovated by Mallavidvaman, who was married to Cattan Pudi's niece. The date refers to the second quarter of the ninth century. It is a *sandhera* temple, in many ways closer to Pallava temple norms than the more sophisticated Chola style that evolved in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It is possible that the names mentioned on the inscription may be of functionaries working at the behest of Vijayala Chola. The inaccessibility of the place, the height at which it was built, and the largeness of its size point to royal patronage.

This Shiva temple's *garbhagriha* was entirely covered with wall paintings, but only a few remain. There is not a single painted figure intact; only a few portions of the human anatomy can be made out. We can see the form of Shiva and the dark face of Bhawani with her tongue sticking out (Fig. 70). Three female figures with distinct faces can be deciphered on the right (Fig. 71). A prince painted on the massive Chola scale can also be seen in outline. We can see the use of terracotta, yellow and orange, but the other colors have evaporated.



70 Vijaya Cholishwaram Temple—Shiva





*Above:*

71 Vijaya Choliswaram Temple—  
Female figures

*Facing page:*

72 Tanjavur, Brihadishvara Temple—  
Rajaraja I and his guru Karuvarar







The Chola empire reached its zenith of expansion, power and affluence during the time of Rajaraja I (AD 986–1014) and Rajendra I (AD 1014–1044). Rajaraja was an extraordinary man and ruler by any standard. At the time of his accession, the Chola kingdom was confined to the Tanjavur district. He extended the kingdom beyond the Pandyan territories to Venadu after defeating the Pandyan king Amarabhujanga; to Kerala after defeating Ravi Varma; and into Karnataka, occupying Coorg or Kodagu (originally called Kodaimale-nadu), parts of lower and eastern Karnataka—including Gangavadi, Banavadi, Tadikaivali, Nolambavadi, and parts of the kingdom of the western Chalukyas, making the River Tungbhabhadra the northern boundary of the Chola state.

It is certain that Rajaraja annexed the northern part of Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Lakshadweep. He was assisted in his career of conquest by a vast army and navy, which sailed across the Bay of Bengal and from the coast of Kerala.<sup>55</sup> He also devised an excellent administrative system and promoted commerce, agriculture and industry. He was a warm and affectionate son, brother, husband and father and a great devotee of Shiva. He built fifty-two temples, the most splendid being Brihadishvara in Tanjavur, which contains the largest body of Chola wall paintings.

The construction of the temple was started in AD 1003 and completed by AD 1010, the 25<sup>th</sup> year of Rajaraja I's reign. An inscription recorded in the 29<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, in AD 1014, provides unique information about the offerings made to this temple, and the arrangements for its administration.<sup>56</sup> It was adjacent to Rajaraja I's palace and was used by the royal family for prayers.

The temple complex is spread over 790 feet in the east-west direction and 400 feet in the north-south direction. Near it are four subsidiary shrines and a Nataraja *mandapa*, hall in front of the sanctum. The temple has sculpted figures representing Shiva in his various forms. Inside the *garbhagriha* Shiva is installed as a monolithic *lingam*.

The walls of the ambulatory chambers behind the *garbhagriha* are covered with paintings originally done in Rajaraja's time with later superimpositions made during the Nayaka period during the reign of Sarfoji II in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some Chola panels of great beauty have been restored by the ASI and depict murals in the epic style; it is the biggest center after Ajanta.

Shiva is painted in all his glory in the passage around the *ardhamandapa*. As Dakshinamurti he is illustrated in a forest, and as Nataraja he is shown receiving the salutations of Rajaraja I, his queens and Rajaraja's guru Karuvarar (Fig. 72).

The next large painting is an illustration of the encounter of the Tamil saint Sundarar with Shiva, disguised as an old man. Sundarar was Shiva's devotee in Kailash, his abode, but he annoyed Shiva by falling in love with two of Parvati's maids, and was sent to earth to do penance. He was raised by two sets of foster parents and his marriage was arranged in a temple resembling the Nataraja Temple at Chidambaram (Fig. 73). Before the wedding rites could be performed Shiva appeared as an old Brahmin, objecting to the marriage on the grounds that Sundarar was his slave (Figs. 74, 75). Sundarar went

Facing page:

73 Tanjavur, Brihadishvara Temple—Shiva Nataraja









*Above:*

**74** Tanjavur, Brihadishvara Temple—Shiva arriving at the venue of Sundarar's wedding disguised as an old man

*Below:*

**75** Tanjavur, Brihadishvara Temple—The awestruck wedding guests looking at Shiva

*Facing page:*

*Above:*

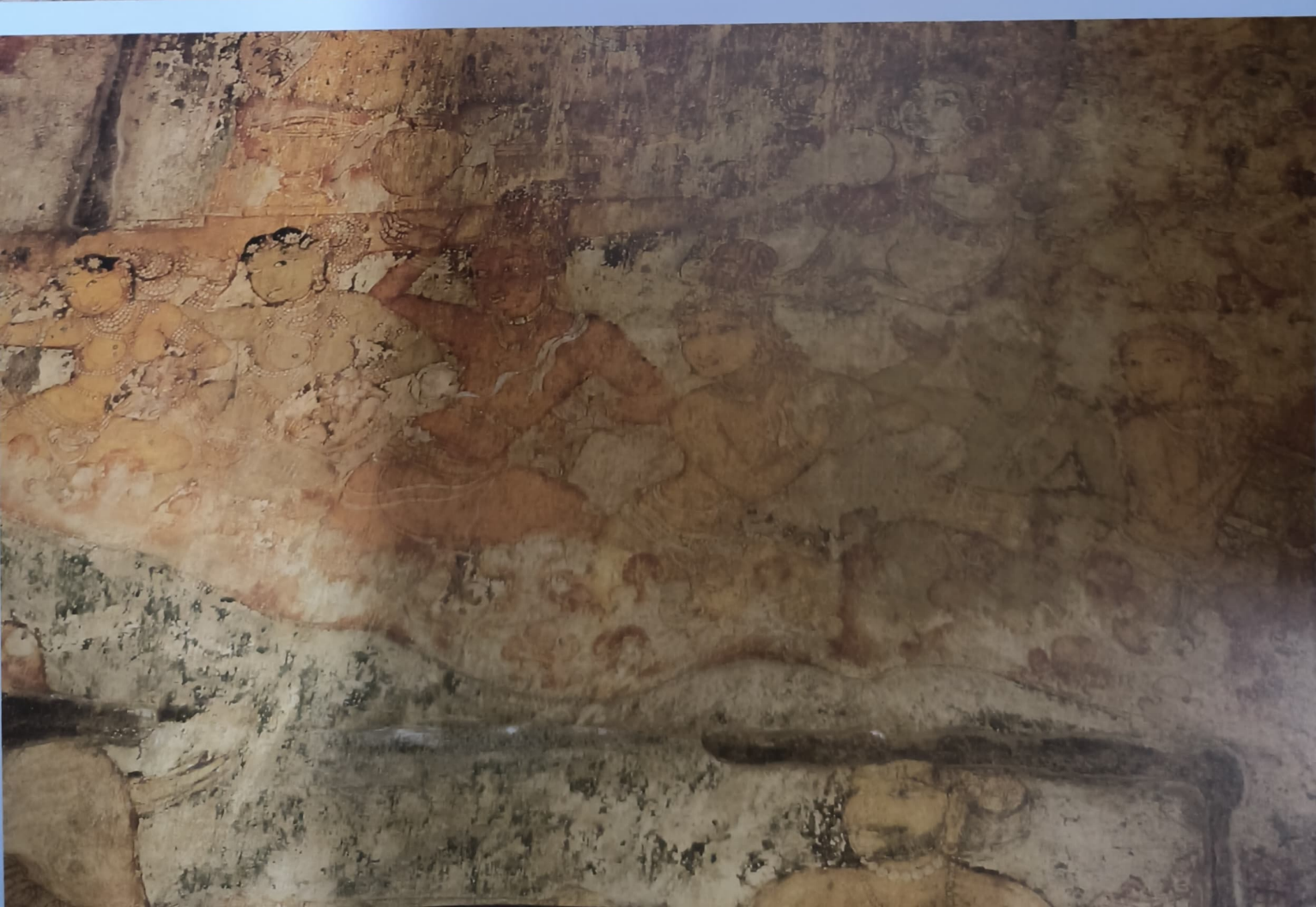
**76** Tanjavur, Brihadishvara Temple—Sundarar setting out on his journey to Kailash

*Below:*

**77** Tanjavur, Brihadishvara Temple—The damsels of Kailash











78 Tanjavur, Brihadishvara Temple—Shiva Tripurantaka

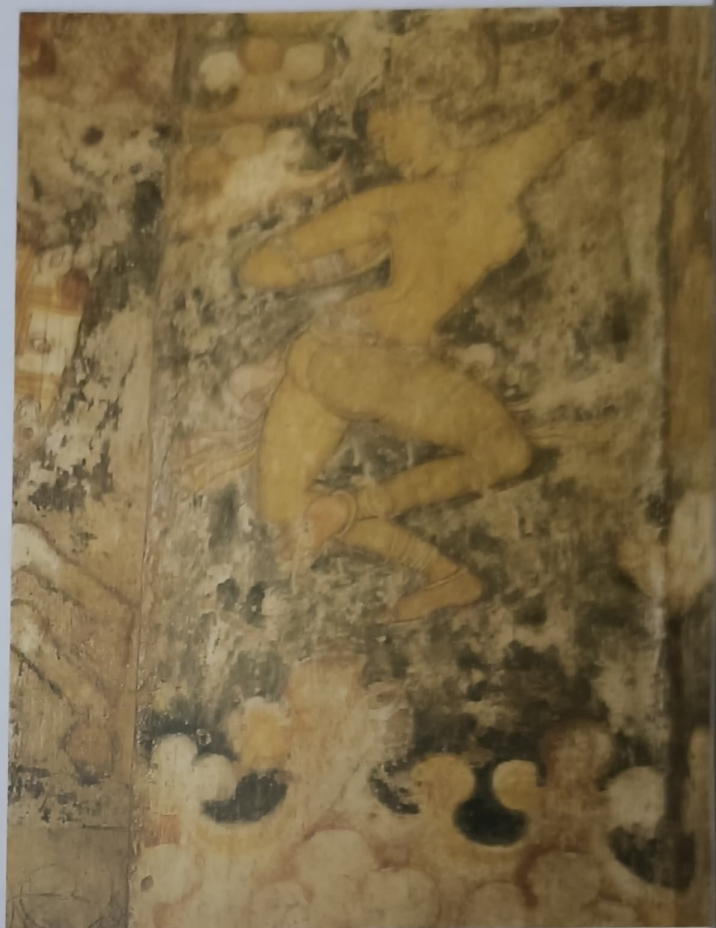
with Shiva, married a girl of his choice and after many pilgrimages went to Mount Kailash on Airavata, where beautiful damsels welcomed him (Figs. 76, 77). The painting is extraordinary in its expressiveness.

A very big panel of Shiva Tripurantaka shows him standing in a chariot, his eight arms carrying different weapons—a commanding figure, taut with tension and pulsating with power (Fig. 78). On the other side are fully armed *ganas* fighting the sons of Tarakasura, the demon king, against whom Indra, the king of heaven, had failed. Opposite the Tripurantaka panel is a painting of Shiva humbling the arrogance of Ravana.

A most tender painting of mother and son shows much lyricism and delicacy. A beautiful tree under which three men who look like villagers (contrary to C. Sivaramamurti's description of them as soldiers) are standing reveals great attention to the depiction of tree leaves (Fig. 79).<sup>57</sup> A young dancing girl, whose front and back are seen simultaneously, has caught the fancy of all art historians and is a thing of great beauty, drawn with the finest lyrical lines, well modeled, expressive, and depicting a Bharata Natyam pose of extreme beauty (Fig. 80). A small panel of a crowned Rajaraja with his guru Karuvarar also exists.

Tamil Nadu painting produced earlier in the first millennium and at the beginning of





the second millennium has a great deal of stylistic similarity whether it was patronized by the Pallavas, the Pandyas or the Cholas. This stylistic similarity cuts across religious boundaries between shrines. Differences in iconographic motifs may occur and be noticeable but the styles are similar—the lyrical quality of the line and vivid coloring have a similarity of emphasis. There are however, variations in expression. The Pallava figures still visible in the Kailashnath Temple at Kanchi have more muscular bodies, and a great deal of emphasis is placed on the hand *mudras*—as is evident in a painting where only Shiva's arm is distinct (Fig. 60). The size of the figures in Brihadishvara and Vijayala Cholishwaram temples can often be massive but the emphasis on musculature is not as pronounced, as seen in the Brihadishvara panel of Rajaraja I and his queen paying homage to Nataraja. Chola compositions are more complex, with greater attention to detail than the remains of Pallava paintings. It is possible that this was due to the limited wall space available in the smaller Pallava temples compared to the abundant space available in the Brihadishvara Temple (for example Fig. 78).

The lyrical quality of Kailashnath, Sittanavasal and Brihadishvara is outstandingly depicted in the figures of dancing women. It is possible that the portrayal of dancing girls gave greater license to artists than the more rigid iconographic formulae governing the depiction of gods.

Left:

**79** Tanjavur, Brihadishvara Temple—Villagers under a tree

Right:

**80** Tanjavur, Brihadishvara Temple—A dancer



## VIJAYANAGARA WALL PAINTING

Vijayanagara conjures up images of heroism, grandeur and national pride. After the Muslims had established their predominance on the throne of Delhi, many of the small states and a few of the big ones rejected their expansion, and some openly challenged them. The state of Mewar in the north, Vijayanagara in the south, and the Marathas in the Deccan stand out as the predominant challengers.

The kingdom of Vijayanagara was founded by the brothers Harihara and Bukka. Some historians think that they were employed as ministers in the state of Kampili in the Deccan<sup>58</sup> while others believe that they were in the armies of Balala III, a Hoysala king (AD 1336–1346).<sup>59</sup> The great martial abilities of the brothers led to the expansion of the kingdom, and by 1377 it already included Tondaimandalam, Madura and Rameshvaram. By 1565 the kingdom extended from the river Krishna in the north to almost the whole of peninsular India, with the exception of Kerala and a very small area outside it. It had humbled the might of the Gajapatis of Orissa and of Sri Lanka.

Vijayanagara was to become the largest state ever founded in South India. It propounded a new concept of kingship. Kings were no longer the pride of one linguistic group. They needed different groups to identify with them. This notion led them to adopt a strategy that would have far-reaching effects on the development of art. They set about winning over influential groups by promoting the idea that they had arisen to protect Hindu *dharma*. They cultivated the heads of powerful *mathas* like that of Sringeri,<sup>60</sup> and made donations to temples on a large scale,<sup>61</sup> enabling them to promote agriculture through “storage economy”<sup>62</sup> and support the rulers in turn by identifying them with divinity.<sup>63</sup> Various sects proliferated,<sup>64</sup> and increased resources led to the building of more shrines.<sup>65</sup> The *mathas* became intellectual centers,<sup>66</sup> and pilgrimages increased with the greater security. The kings also promoted Vaishnava literature. Great works were written in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Sanskrit. Mandapurusha, Hariharadas and Janprakasar were great writers in Tamil. Telugu produced great scholars like Nandi Timana, the author of *Parijata Parharnam*, *Jakhana*, *Srinath* and *Yellana*. In Sanskrit, Sayana wrote his commentary on the *Vedas* named *Sayana Bhashya*, and *Vidyamadhavia* on astronomy, among others.

A common factor under the Vijayanagara rulers was economic prosperity. Large areas of land came under cultivation through the migration of labor from one place to another.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, with the existence of a vast army and a lavish court, with the aristocracy aping its standards, the production of a vast number of luxury goods like diamonds, jewelry, expensive clothes, furnishings, textiles and handicrafts increased. The migration of Brahmins from Tamil Nadu to Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh,<sup>68</sup> and of Telugus to Tamil Nadu, in search of fortunes and business, increased entrepreneurial development in Tanjavur and Salem.<sup>69</sup> Gujaratis also migrated from Saurashtra and went as far as Madura for trade in textiles, where a locality was named after them.<sup>70</sup> Muslims<sup>71</sup> and Marathas from the Deccan also came looking for employment in the construction industry. All these migrations were not only to bring prosperity but also to create a cosmopolitan culture, and profoundly influence art. The social ethos of the Vijayanagara kingdom bred gentlemen patrons of art from the inception of this state. The well-planned city of Vijayanagara is an architectural and town-planning marvel. It



has many small palaces, the Lotus Mahal, a beautiful tank built on zodiacal considerations and a Mahanavmi (a festival which is held in honor of Mahamaya Devi) platform, along with numerous sculptures. Devaraya I built the Ramachandra Temple, Krishnadevaraya built the Krishna and possibly the Anantshyana and Vithalasvami temples.<sup>72</sup> Achutaraya may have been associated with the Pattabhirama temple complex. Army general Viranna and treasurer Virupanna built the Leepakshi Temple; Tirumala, a minister built the Tiruvengalanatha Temple;<sup>73</sup> Irrugappa, the *sangeeta mandapa* of Tirupparutikanram. What is awe inspiring is the presence of almost five hundred temples built here devoted to various gods. At sunset over this dead city the vibrations of the tinkling of bells in these temples can be heard some of which to this day receive adoration and worship.

One cannot but think that the splendid buildings of Vijayanagara would have been adorned with wall paintings, a tradition which was already well developed in the Deccan and in the earlier kingdoms of the south. The fact that it was prevalent in the 14<sup>th</sup> century itself is indicated from an inscription dated 1378 which makes a reference to the gods "who dwelt unknown to him [Harihara II] in their pictures on the walls."<sup>74</sup> This would indicate that wall paintings existed in Vijayanagara in the last quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The ambassador, Abdur Razzak, sent to the court of Devaraya II by the king of Herat in 1443, wrote about the existence of wall paintings on the Mahanavmi platform, which he saw during the grand celebration of that festival. He stated, "On that beautiful plane were raised adjoining pavilions from two to five stages high, on which from top to bottom were painted all kinds of figures that imagination can conceive of; men, wild animals, birds and all kinds of beasts down to flies and gnats. All these were painted with exceeding delicacy and taste."<sup>75</sup> He also mentioned the existence of paintings in a temple in Bidrur,<sup>76</sup> but did not mention the name of the temple. Ferishta further stated that there was a special street in Vijayanagara containing the mansions of courtesans on which there were figures of lions, panthers, tigers and other animals, so well painted as to seem alive.<sup>77</sup> We also have evidence from the 16<sup>th</sup>-century memoirs of the Portuguese Paes about the existence of wall paintings in Vijayanagara. He described his visit to the palace of Krishnadevaraya in 1520, stating that, "At the entrance of the door outside are two images painted like life and drawn in their manner which is these, the one on the right hand is of the father of this King and the one on the left is of this King. The father was dark and a gentleman of fine form stouter than the son is, they stand with all their apparel and such raiment as they wear or used to wear when alive." He also provided a description of a room ornamented with ivory carvings and stated that "in this room is designed in painting all the ways of life of the men who have been here, even down to the Portuguese, from which the King's wives can understand the manner in which each one lives in his own country, even to the blind and the beggars."<sup>78</sup> He added that the dance chambers of the royal ladies also had wall paintings. Paes also writes that after his prayers, the king went to a building made like an open porch—which has many pillars hung with cloths right up to the top and with walls handsomely painted—for conducting the business of the state.<sup>79</sup>

The Vijayanagara wall painting tradition was spread over all the areas of the empire's rule, including Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Since this style is the contribution of a single kingdom, the paintings of this period will be discussed as one genre.



### TIRUPPARUTIKANRAM TEMPLE

The distinction of being the first center of extant wall painting in the Vijayanagara kingdom goes to Tirupparutikanram in Chinglepet district of Tamil Nadu. The temple has been studied at great length by T. N. Ramachandran in his seminal work *Tirupparutikanram and Its Temples*. The exact date of the construction of this temple is not known, but the earliest inscription found here relates to the Chola Kolottunga I period, precisely to the year AD 1116.<sup>80</sup> Ramachandran maintains that the *ardhamandapa* in front of this shrine was extended during the period of Krishnadevaraya (AD 1509–1529) as indicated by the monarch's inscription, dated 1517. The *sangeeta mandapa*, music hall, which is in front of the main shrine of Vardhamana, and the *ardhamandapa* have an inscription dated 1387–1388, which records that "*Srimat Vaichaya-dandanath, Vanyasamvalsara Prabhave Sankyovan Irugappa Kripatih Sri Pushpasena Janaya Sri Kanchi Jina Vardhamana niloyosyagre mahamandapam Sangitartham achikaracheha silanya buddham samantat sthalam II*." It states, when translated from the Tamil *grantha* script, that Irugappa—the son of the General Vaichaya and himself a general—built in Prabhava (AD 1387–1388) at the instance of Pushpasena a *mahamandapa*, a big room or hall, in front of the Kanchi Temple of Jina Vardhamana for hosting musical concerts. The entire hall was paved with slabs of granite.

Left:

81 Vijayanagara, Tirupparutikanram,  
Tirupparutikanram Jain Temple—  
A beautiful damsel

Right:

82 Vijayanagara, Tirupparutikanram,  
Tirupparutikanram Jain Temple—  
Indra and Sachi with Airavat





The interior of the Vardhamana shrine does not have any wall paintings but its facade has what appear to be Vijayanagara wall paintings. The *sangeeta mandapa* has two different styles of painting, the earliest, few in number, on the walls at the entrance and the later, on the ceiling just in front of the *ardhamandapa*. T. R. Ramachandran dates all the earliest paintings of the *sangeeta mandapa* to the Irugappa period. Sivaramamurti dates some of the paintings to the 14<sup>th</sup> century and believes that the others belong to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>81</sup> There is no inscriptional evidence to indicate the date. On stylistic grounds, it appears that the earliest paintings in the *sangeeta mandapa* can be dated to the patronage of Irugappa, i.e., late 14<sup>th</sup> century. He would not have built a huge *sangeeta mandapa* without any ornamentation, especially since Ramachandran has identified a sculptural representation of the patron.<sup>82</sup> The paintings at the entrance are in the same style as the Pallava temple at Kanchipuram and have distinct similarities with the Kailashnath Temple at Ellora. A figure of a beautiful *shodashi*, 16-year-old woman, looking at her face in a mirror held by a young maid is simple, elegant and extremely expressive (Fig. 81). Only half of this elegant woman's face is in view but her eye is clearly done in the style of contemporary Jain miniature painting. Two male figures (half the body of one is already destroyed) show a line which is delicate, expressive and sure. Another beautiful vertical panel on a rust-colored background depicts a young couple, perhaps Indra and Sanchi, pouring oblations on a statue of Vardhamana. The face of Indra's mount, the elephant, intrudes into the composition (Fig. 82).

Most of the panels in front of the Vardhamana shrine have become indistinct with age. They are dull, much larger in size than the paintings, of the *sangeeta mandapa*, and appear closer to the Leepakshi paintings as far as the beauty of line is concerned. The figures of a few Svetambara monks and a *samavasarana* can be made out quite distinctly.

### VIRUPAKSHA TEMPLE

In Vijayanagara city, the earliest extant wall paintings are found in the Virupaksha Temple. The temple was definitely in existence in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century—a fact implied by a 1347 inscription that mentions Marappa Vodayar making obeisance to Virupaksha.<sup>83</sup> It seems likely that it started off as a small shrine and was gradually expanded. It is also likely that all the Harihara kings contributed to its growth, for it is unlikely that Harihara I, Bukka I and Bukka II did not make any contributions to its expansion. An inscription mentions that Saluva Narasimha usurped the throne in 1485.<sup>84</sup> Paes mentions that Krishnadevaraya used to visit this temple after his bath.<sup>85</sup>

Dallapiccola has strong arguments against dating the Virupaksha paintings to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, based on considerations of style.<sup>86</sup> An argument has been advanced that as there are differences in style between the paintings of the Virupaksha and Leepakshi temples, and as the date of the Leepakshi wall paintings has been accepted as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Virupaksha paintings that look different in style must belong to a later period. This point of view is further supported by the fact that Virupaksha paintings share distinct similarities with the later styles of Tirupparutikanram and Shravana Belagola, both presumed to have come into existence in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

We know that additions and repairs are made to palatial buildings and temples by successive generations of owners or patrons, therefore all the paintings may not be





83 Vijayanagara, Hampi,  
Virupaksha Temple—Shiva and  
Parvati



contemporaneous with the construction of the building. The Virupaksha wall paintings are extensive and would have required immense resources, which could only come from a rich patron or the temple itself. No such patron exists in any document or even in local memory.

Finally, until we have a way to establish the exact date of the Virupaksha wall paintings it seems safer and more prudent to continue with the earlier surmise that these paintings belong to the Krishnadevaraya period.

The *mukhamandapa* ceiling may have originally been adorned with paintings around the time of the creation of the beautiful sculptures on its pillars, probably during the reign of Krishnadevaraya (AD 1509–1529), when the kingdom was at the zenith of its prosperity. These paintings cover a space roughly 32 feet in length and 16 feet in width. There is a conceptual design of horizontal and vertical panels done roughly in eight rows.

In a temple dedicated to Shiva it is natural to expect a profusion of illustrations from the *Shiva Purana*. From among the paintings relating to Shiva (Fig. 83), the most remarkable is that of Shiva in the form of Tripurantaka, fighting the demons attacking him. Sivaramamurti has tried to make much out of the fact that the painting of the bow of Tripurantaka is different from the Chola or even Rashtrakuta type of painted bow, which happens to be more slender than this massive bow. He has also pointed out the existence of a moustache on Tripurantaka's face as an emblem of ferocity to make him look valiant and fierce.<sup>87</sup> This panel is remarkable for the strength and muscular shape of Shiva's body and the arrangement of the various compositional groups so that they do not detract from the importance of the main figure of Tripurantaka or his expression of fury. The inclusion of Nandi, seen running behind the chariot, adds poignancy to this panel. The panel does not strictly follow the description given of this event in the *Shiva Purana*.<sup>88</sup> Shiva's chariot does not have Brahma as the charioteer, nor does it have the exact number of spokes in its wheels, nor the *devis*, goddesses—including Ganga—holding *chamara*, flywhisks. Neither is the chariot accompanied by friendly gods like Vishnu. The artists use their own iconographic imagination.

A lyrical panel depicts Manmath, the god of love, who was sent to stop Shiva's meditation<sup>89</sup> so that he could produce a son who would save the gods from the demons. The painting also shows a beautiful world in spring with flowers, birds and lovely animals created by Manmath to arouse love in Shiva's heart. The figure of Manmath is strongly built, and great movement is imparted to his figure, not only by the stance of his legs but also by the movement of his chariot and the *gandharvas* (Fig. 84).

The marriage of Shiva is shown in a standing Panigrahana ceremony in which the Hindu bridegroom takes the hands of his bride, to symbolize his responsibility for her welfare as his *ardhangini*, better half. Unlike the merriment of the bridegroom's party described in the *Shiva Purana*,<sup>90</sup> all the characters here are painted in staid and formal poses. Vishnu, Lakshmi, Brahma, and Parvati's parents are formally attired. Strangely enough, at the farther end of this panel is a figure of the ram-headed Daksha—Parvati's father in her previous incarnation as Sati—standing quietly with Nandi (Fig. 85). Vishnu has also been painted with his consort Lakshmi and in his ten *avataaras*.









*Facing page:*

**84** Vijayanagara, Hampi, Virupaksha Temple—Manmath aiming his bow at Shiva

*Above:*

**85** Vijayanagara, Hampi, Virupaksha Temple—Shiva's wedding





Above:

86 Vijayanagara, Hampi, Virupaksha Temple—The protective divinities

Facing page:

87 Vijayanagara, Hampi, Virupaksha Temple—Arjuna participating in Draupadi's *swayamvara*

The *lokpalas*, guardian deities of the universe, are represented by, among others, Agni, the god of fire, on his mount, the ram; Varuna on a *makara* or crocodile; Vayu on an antelope; Kubera on a horse; Isana on his bull; Nirriti on his human mount; and Yama on a buffalo (Fig 86). There are also small cameos of *asuras*, demons; protective divinities, and the devotees of various gods playing musical instruments.

Two of the best-preserved panels are illustrations from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, and represent the *swayamvaras*, the public selection of a husband for a girl—of Arjuna and Rama. In the former, Arjuna is depicted participating in an archery contest organized by Draupadi's father, King Drupad, to decide his daughter's bridegroom. Arjuna stands with head bowed in prayer to Lord Shiva, aiming at the fish's eye by looking at its reflection in a plate of water. He is dressed like royalty, in a departure from the *Mahabharata* account of the Pandava disguise as poor Brahmins. The composition consists of only three main characters, but the strong lines of the drawing, the postures of all three characters and the intense concentration on their faces makes it a powerful painting. The royal court is shown through an arch suggestive of an elaborate palace in









*Above:*

**88** Vijayanagara, Hampi, Virupaksha Temple—The marriage of Rama and Sita

*Facing page:*

**89** Vijayanagara, Anantpur, Leepakshi Temple—Shiva as a bridegroom









Above:

90 Vijayanagara, Anantpur,  
Leepakshi Temple—Parvati's  
friends

Facing page:

91 Vijayanagara, Anantpur,  
Leepakshi Temple—Parvati in the  
form of a boar

the background. The peacocks perched on either side of the arch indicate the auspiciousness of the occasion and the grandeur of royalty. In the four vertical panels, princes stand, looking at the central panel—formal viewers of the main action and props of grandeur (Fig. 87).

Rama, the great hero of the *Ramayana*, whom the kings and people of Vijayanagara greatly revered, is the central character at his marriage with Sita, and his brothers' marriages with her sisters. The figures of the main characters are more youthful, as befits their teenage stature, the poses are formal and there is a touching delicacy and lyricism of line and expression (Fig. 88).

Dallapiccola<sup>91</sup> considers the large painting of Vidyaranya—the preceptor of the first two rulers of the Sangma dynasty, seated in a palanquin and escorted by standard bearers and footmen—a masterpiece, but it lacks the delicacy of expression of the Manmath panel or even of the three wedding panels of Shiva, Rama and Arjuna.















Previous pages:

92 Anantpur, Leepakshi Temple—  
Arjuna about to attack the boar

The most unusual thing about the Virupaksha ceiling wall paintings is that they are stratified into compartments, with outlines and definite sizes marked for various themes. Unlike the true epic tradition of Ajanta, no panel overflows into the other. Each is confined to a defined space.

The painted small houses above the panels depicting the marriages of Rama and Arjuna indicate prosperity, and the eyes of the human figures point to Jain influence. It is possible that many artists who painted at this time were Jains as they had a tradition of miniature painting prior to these wall paintings.

These paintings, although confined to squares and defined spaces, do not lack movement or expression. The human figures in motion, the stances of the animals carrying them, the willowy shape of the trees, and above all the lotus flowers enclosing the paintings give them movement. There is also a great deal of expression and strength in the paintings imparted by the taut musculature of the male bodies. However, they do not have the lyrical quality of Leepakshi, in spite of the delicacy of line. Vasundhara Filliozat thinks that the walls of the Krishna temple show traces of wall paintings<sup>92</sup> but no further argument exists to support this hypothesis.

In Annegundi Uchhayappa Matha, north of Hampi, paintings have also been found that could be dated to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Women palanquin-bearers; horses; *kunjara kamini*—a group of women arranged in the shape and form of an elephant; creepers; bushes and lotus flowers remain visible.<sup>93</sup>

### LEEPAKSHI TEMPLE

Nestling in the dry plains of southern Andhra Pradesh in Anantpur district, nine miles from Hindpur town is the exquisite temple of Leepakshi, dedicated to the Virbhadrā form of Shiva. It was built on a huge rocky promontory known as Kurmasila, meaning a resting tortoise, because of its shape. According to a temple inscription it was funded by two sons of the Nayakas, or a feudatory ruler of Penukonda named Nandilakkiseti. These two sons were Virupanna, the imperial treasurer and his brother Viranna who was supposed to have been a general in the army of Achutaraya (AD 1530–1542). According to one of the temple inscriptions, Achutaraya also donated land to this temple. The brothers were great devotees of Lord Shiva in his forms as warrior and destroyer of evil. A local legend claims that Virupanna embezzled money from the royal treasury to build the temple and was summoned to court to account for his actions when the king heard of it. Knowing the punishment for his crime would be blinding, he gouged out his own eyes and threw them at the temple wall. The legend is probably apocryphal, because a temple inscription dated 1537 indicates that Achutaraya made a donation to the temple, an act repeated five years later by Virupanna.

Virupanna and Viranna seem to be patrons with a highly developed aesthetic sense. Everything in this temple was meticulously chosen, designed and planned with great attention. The grand location is spellbinding. The temple contains three shrines dedicated to Virbhadrā, the son of Shiva; Raghunath and Hanuman. The design of the architecture, sculpture and wall paintings seems to have been coordinated. The main shrine of



Virbhadrā is the only one with wall paintings, and also has several sculptures of gods, goddesses, heavenly dancers, monkeys and birds. Two interesting series of sculptured reliefs narrate the stories of the *Kiratarjuniyam* and of a Shiva devotee called Sriyal.

The ceiling of the *garbhagriha* has a painting of Virbhadrā, who was created by Shiva to avenge the death of his wife Sati in her father's *yajna*, sacrifice.<sup>94</sup> It is a powerful figure with several arms, eyes conveying great terror, and great movement through fluttering clothes. The artists have taken artistic license by painting the figures of Virupanna and his family at the feet of Virbhadrā. The *pradakshina*, circambulatory passage, behind the *garbhagriha* contains paintings of Shiva, Vishnu, Virabhadrā and an indistinct deity. The paintings on the ceiling of the *mukhamandapa* include Shiva rising from his *linga*,<sup>95</sup> and Shiva as Andhakasura, Bhikshatana, Gangadharana and Ardhanarisvara.

The most interesting painting illustrates Shiva's marriage with Parvatī. Shiva, adorned with ornaments is welcomed by the women of Parvatī's family, while Vishnu and Brahma stand to his left (Fig. 89). Further on the right is a partly visible Parvatī being adorned by her friends while five beautifully drawn women watch her (Fig. 90). Above, Shiva and Parvatī listen to music played by celestial maidens in Kailāsha. All the figures are drawn delicately and dressed elegantly. The women's dresses have the different traditional weaves of Andhra Pradesh that are still in vogue.

The paintings on the *mukhamandapa* emphasize Shiva's ready generosity to his devoted followers as they all depict legends of his munificence. The most powerful and the best-preserved of these paintings is of the *Kiratarjuniyam*, which tells of an encounter between Arjuna and Shiva. Arjuna performed *tapasya*, penance, in the forest to win from Shiva his invincible arms, not realizing that Shiva and Parvatī were watching him. They decide to test him and Parvatī takes the form of a boar (Fig. 91), knowing that Arjuna will try and hunt it. Shiva disguises himself as a hunter and attacks the boar as Arjuna takes a shot at it. They start quarrelling (Fig. 92). Arjuna raises his hand to attack Shiva when Shiva reveals his true form and Arjuna prostrates himself before him. Shiva then blesses him and gives him his divine weapon, which Arjuna later uses to finally destroy and vanquish the Kauravas in the final battle of Kurukshetra (Fig. 93). It is interesting to note that while Arjuna is depicted in powerful proportions with a big, muscular body, the figures of Shiva, the hunter, and his attendant, are slender, as befits *yogis*, practitioners of yoga, always immersed in meditation. The artists have succeeded in bestowing great movement and excitement to this panel, through Shiva and Parvatī in motion at the right hand corner, through Shiva as a hunter, and above all through the figures of birds and dogs rushing, deer flying, and the powerful figure of a boar with raised legs about to attack Arjuna. By contrast, the figure in the left corner of the *mukhamandapa*—where Arjuna, meditating. The rendering of his facial expression displays a mastery of technique. Is certainly the best work in the Leepakshi Temple. Movement has been added to this static panel by depicting a flying carrier, a kind of flowery scarf on which *ganas* are seated, showering flowers on the meditating *yogi*, who looks awestruck at this phenomenon. His long hair is painted as windblown to add movement.

Following pages:

Page 108, above:

93 Vijayanagara, Anantpur, Leepakshi Temple—Arjuna receiving the blessings of Shiva

Page 108, below left:

94 Vijayanagara, Anantpur, Leepakshi Temple—Arjuna meditating

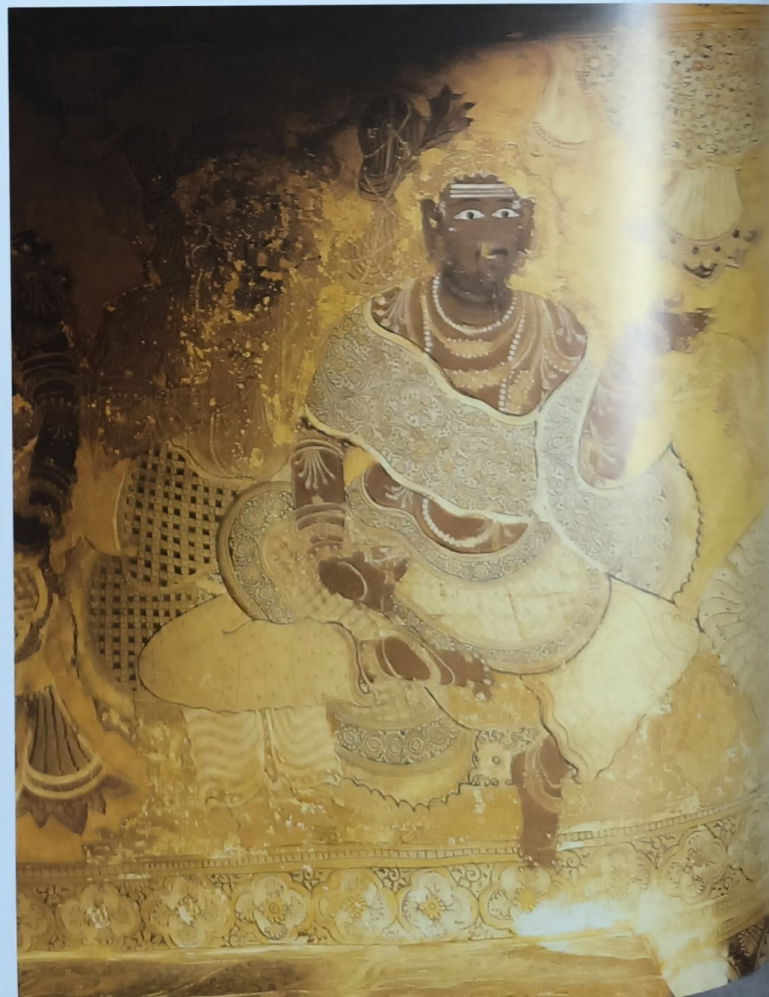
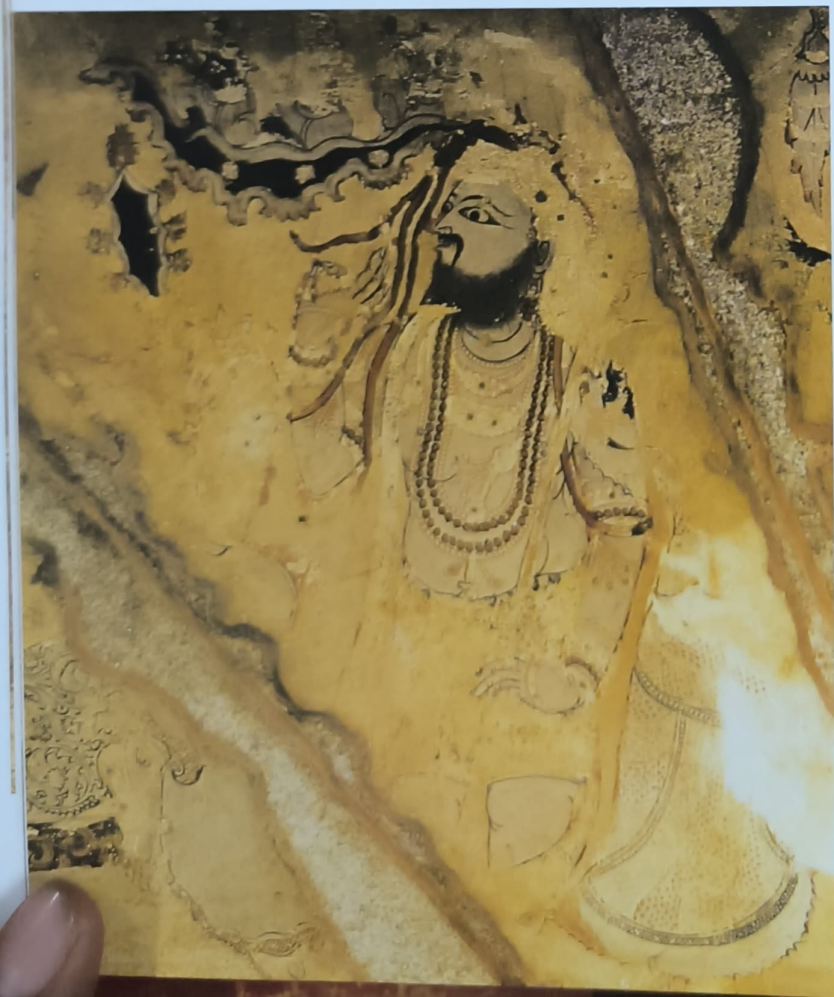
Page 108, below right:

95 Vijayanagara, Anantpur, Leepakshi Temple—A royal *yogi*

Page 109:

96 Vijayanagara, Anantpur, Leepakshi Temple—Ravana Anugrahamurti













Shiva is also painted as Chandresh Anugrahamurti, bestowing his axe on Chandresh, his great devotee, to signify his status as the steward of his household. Ravana, another great devotee, is seen in Shiva's abode asking for *atma linga*, the symbol of divine consciousness (Fig. 96).

A royal *bhakta* with Shaivite marks, wearing rich ornaments—a princely crown, beautiful woven upper garments and *dhoti*—obviously a royal figure, is painted with the greatest attention to detail (Fig. 95).

It is interesting that one of the most beautiful panels in the temple is devoted to Vishnu in his form as the infant Krishna—Balagopala—lying on a leaf with many devotees, including *brahmarishis*, self realized sages, and *rajarishis*, royal sages, paying him homage. Other paintings on the Vishnu theme in the *mukhamandapa* include Draupadi's marriage to Arjuna in Krishna's presence, and Rama with Hanumana.

97 Vijayanagara, Anantpur,  
Leepakshi Temple—The brothers  
Virupanna and Viranna





One of the most commented-upon wall paintings of the Leepakshi Temple<sup>96</sup> is the panel depicting six male figures in a row on a hilly incline (Fig. 97). The fact that four of them wear high conical caps similar to the headdress worn by Krishnadevaraya in his sculpture at Tirupati indicates their superior status as aristocrats; the other two wear simple turbans. The size of the figures further seems to indicate their importance. The two brothers Virupanna and Viranna are largest in size and are supposed to be receiving *prasada*, offering. The other two may be younger brothers. All the characters are formally dressed and have great dignity of expression. The positioning of their legs and their flowing garments indicates that they were climbing a hill or platform.

Strangely enough, among this assemblage of themes on gods and their devotees is a painting of a legend concerning a Chola prince out on a hunt, whose chariot accidentally runs over a calf and kills it. The cow, anguished and angered at this death of her progeny, accosts the prince's father, the Chola king Manunitikonda—whose name epitomized



justice—and demanded justice through the restoration of the life of her calf and the prince's punishment. The king kills his son to give justice to the cow. Shiva, impressed with this, appears to bless the king, and restores to life the prince as well as the calf. There is great movement in the depiction of this story as well as richness in expressive qualities (Fig. 98).

A scroll of geese has been painted in the *ardhamandapa* and also in a sculptural frieze, indicating coordination between the sculptor and the painter. Floral borders enclose all the *mukhamandapa* paintings, some of which are also framed with half-rolled-up curtains and tapestries. In the *parikrama* around the *garbhagriha* there are paintings in which only Shiva, Hanumana and Devi can be deciphered. In the Raghunathalya shrine, the various *avataras* of Vishnu have been painted.

The style of composition is epic in scale, and different episodes of a story continue, one after another, as in the panels on the *Kiratarjuniyam*. A feeling of space prevails, and the perspective is excellent.

The human figures have mostly been painted in profile, at which the artists seem to be more skilled than they are at frontal faces. Most of the figures seem to be moving from the left to the right. The artist seems to have specialized in painting the powerful muscular bodies of the gods, as well as tall and well-built men and women. The waists of the human figures seem to be rather thickset—like Arjuna's figure—in all the panels. There

98 Vijayanagara, Anantpur,  
Leepakshi Temple—Shiva blessing  
his *bhaktas*







*Above:*

**99** Nayaka painting,  
Tirupparutikanram,  
Tirupparutikanram Jain  
Temple—*Samavasarana*

*Below:*

**100** Nayaka painting,  
Tirupparutikanram,  
Tirupparutikanram Jain  
Temple—Kaccha and  
Mahakaccha with Mahavira  
in the forest









is, however, elegance in the postures of both the male and female figures. The women's hair is luxuriant, befitting south Indian women, and arranged in buns, which are still fashionable in the south. The abundance of moustaches and especially beards is rather a specialty of Leepakshi painting. The protruding eye for which Jain miniature painting is known is already in view, but it is not yet quite as protruding as in later Jain painting.

The depiction of landscape continues to be sparse, in the tradition of Ajanta, but Jain influence seems to have entered in the shapes of trees. Most of the trees are ornamental, not natural, as was the case in the Virupaksha Temple wall paintings at Hampi.

Like at Ajanta, the artists have shown great feeling in the drawing of animals like bulls, calves and cows. Most significantly in the *Kiratarjuniyam* painting (Fig. 92), the boar's expression reveals eyes complete with eyebrows and wrinkles and a look as powerful as in the eyes of Arjuna himself. The figure is also full of movement and has the expression of terror often seen on the faces of hunted animals.

The Leepakshi Temple was not the only temple built by the feudatory chieftains at the height of the Vijayanagara kingdom's power. During Krishnadevaraya's reign, his minister Saluva Timma adorned the temple of Raghavesvara at Kondavidu with frescoes and also donated to the deity the village of Maidavolu for the upkeep<sup>97</sup> of the temple.

The Vishnu Temple at Somapalayam in the Anantpur district of Andhra Pradesh also has wall paintings on the *Ramayana* theme, which have mostly been destroyed, though occasional figures of Dasratha, Taraka, Rama and Sita are partially visible. The headgear of the figures appears to be of the Krishnadevaraya and Achutadevaraya period, which seems to indicate their 16<sup>th</sup> century origin.

Vijayanagara paintings also exist in the Varadaraja Temple at Kanchipuram. Its temple walls were originally covered with paintings, but most of them have now become indecipherable. Sivaramamurti<sup>98</sup> was able to make out the existence of some pictures relating to *Krishna Leela*—the miracles and life of Krishna—with the *gopis*, and *Kaliya Madha Mardana*, the humbling of the pride of the snake Kaliya. Kaliya used to swallow the children of Vrindavana, and Krishna entered his stomach to kill him, but on the snake's pleas for mercy, he came out and danced on his head to humble him. There are also two conventional paintings of Vidyaranya, the head of the Sringeri *matha* being carried in a palanquin, and of Manmatha, the god of love, with his wife Rati. In the corridor wall of the Vardaraja shrine is a depiction of Garuda, the *vahana* of Vishnu. One scholar has been able to decipher the pictures of Alvars and Nammalvar and thinks the descriptions below them point to a 16<sup>th</sup> century date for the paintings. They appear to be in the Leepakshi style.<sup>99</sup> Most of the colors of these paintings have evaporated.

In Tiruvannamalai, in Tanjavur district, a Shiva temple built in the hoary past but renovated during Chola times contains Vijayanagara period wall paintings that have been assigned to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They include remarkable illustrations on the Krishna theme in bright red and pale blue, with a shower of flowers indicating Jain influence.

Facing page:

101 Nayaka painting, Tirupparutikanram, Tirupparutikanram Jain Temple—Kaccha and Mahakaccha trying to bring down fruit from a tree



The Pundariksha Temple at Tiruvallam near Srirangam has paintings very similar to those of Leepakshi, and an odd assortment of figures like a snake, a boar, and a monkey. Balagopala, Kaliyadaman, Rama, Lakshmana, and Sugriv and his coronation are some of the themes illustrated.

As far as the stylistic analysis of Vijayanagara painting is concerned, many strands of influence have helped to create the earliest paintings at Tirupparutikanram. The paintings at Tirupparutikanram show the influence of Ellora and Ajanta, as the human figures are in the same style. The influence of Chola painting, which should have been predominant, is not as significant; the size of human figures, their facial characteristics and musculature are all different. The influence of Hoysala art, especially its sculpture, is evident in the big-bodied human figures. What is most remarkable is the influence of Jain painting. We do not know how it arrived, whether through the painter, or more likely, through Gujarati merchants who perhaps brought with them collections of miniatures. Here there is dignity, formality and elegance, as befits the art of a major political power. The figures are large in size and never let their guard down. The colors used are simple and elegant. The use of space is very effective, compositions are simple, movement is indicated through the stance of figures, and the use of landscapes, trees and architectural props is rare.

Regine Pachner<sup>100</sup> has suggested Persian influence in the *Kiratarjuniyam* hunting scene of Shiva and Arjuna's confrontation, indicating further that the boar painted there was a symbol of the Vijayanagara state, which would suggest the ascent of Vijayanagara and the religio-political situation of the kingdom. This scholar thinks that the Persian forest further reinforces the use of Islamic conventions. It means that the boar has been led into the Islamic field of action (the Deccan Sultanates) and indicates the aggression of the royal house. This scholar believes that the wall paintings of the Virupaksha Temple can also be interpreted in their religio-political connotation especially through the Tripurantaka panel in the Virupaksha Temple. The three circles of demons, representing the three demonic cities, supposedly stand for the three kingdoms of the Muslim Shahs. This supposition seems unlikely as there is no proof of Persian paintings arriving here.

## NAYAKA WALL PAINTING

The governors appointed by the Vijayanagara rulers to oversee various provinces were called Nayakas. They were given duties by the kings through what were called *nayaka-katanams* which made them responsible for collecting tributes, levying revenues and maintaining armed retainers for kings, wars and expeditions.<sup>101</sup> Inscriptions have been found in which the Nayakas have requested remission of taxes or for grants.<sup>102</sup> Even after 1565 the Nayakas continued to pay tribute money to Vijayanagara rulers. They also used their homage to their king as talismanic value for their legitimacy and status as feudatory rulers.

Their concept of kingship was different from Chola and Vijayanagara times, where it was balanced by its formal identification with *dharma*. Although they carried on the tradition of temple building and the patronage of other arts, their philosophy of life was different. They openly believed in a policy of *bhoga*, self-gratification, and the idealized picture of *dharmic* (divine) kingship never appears, not even in the context of their



proclaimed identification with Rama—whom they considered an ideal not of moral norms but of physical charm. This is reflected in the *Sringarakavya Ahalyasankrandanam* of Samukhamu Venkata Krishnappa Nayaka, written in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century in Madura, which promotes the concept that the violation of social order for self-gratification is right. Some scholars believe that if *bhoga* assumes sensual and sexual experiences based on emotional need it presupposes violation, then a society oriented toward it must incorporate antinomian drives. As a consequence, nominative hierarchies were challenged or reversed as in the case of Shudra political ideology.<sup>103</sup>

This philosophy stressed the importance of giving temples *daana*, in the form of gold and jewels as opposed to land. It also encouraged participation in temple rituals and raising the Nayaka's style of living to the level of divinity. The display of wealth and lavish style was the norm, as depicted in *Ragunathanayakaabhyudayamu* and other popular Tamil works dripping with sensuousness verging on the erotic—like Venkatkavi's *Sarangdharacaritrama*, Krishnappa Nayaka's *Ahalyasankrandanam* and Seshamu Venkatapati's *Tarasankovijayamu*, which show the lifestyle of Raghunath Nayaka of Tanjavur. It was a culture that believed in consumption and did not encourage the accumulation of wealth or its investment. The wealthy kings and merchant princes project a picture of great generosity to poets, hungry Brahmins, courtesans, deities and themselves.<sup>104</sup> Temple construction increased greatly during the Nayaka period.<sup>105</sup> It may further be noted, that although until then there was a predominance of Shaiva shrines, during this period shrines to Amman and Ganesha increased.<sup>106</sup> This lifestyle was to be reflected in the type of art they patronized. Their temples, sculptures and paintings are opulent; a kind of baroque effect is given to figures, human and divine, with big bodies that looked more bloated than muscular, where the most important part of the human anatomy for men was their stomachs and for women their breasts. There is also a sense of fun and of enjoyment, which adds vitality to this art. Iconographically, they adopted crowns, forms of dressing, the positioning of human figures, and many other motifs from Vijayanagara painting, which leads some scholars to term them as later Vijayanagara paintings.

Portuguese sources claim that the Nayakas were very wealthy—some of them even became extortionists. They followed a policy of encouraging agriculture, and trade was booming during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This can be seen from the data provided by Arasratnam on the extent of commerce in one port on the Coromandel Coast, Porto Novo. This single port carried on trade with Arakan in Burma, Syria, Mergui, Johara, Manila, Bantam, Aceh, Sri Lanka, Malacca and Bandar Abbas. It was inevitable that the state would benefit, along with the traders, from this heavy trade.<sup>107</sup> The most prominent *nayakadoms*, estates of the Nayakas, in Tamil Nadu during the late Vijayanagara period and later, existed in Madura, Tanjavur and Gingee, also called Sengi.



## KANCHIPURAM

It appears that the royal family of Vijayanagara ruled Kanchipuram proper and its surrounding areas directly, with the help of local officials. The best wall paintings of the Nayaka period are at the Tirupparutikanram Temple in Jina Kanchi.

From the Nayaka period we are concerned with the wall paintings on the ceiling of the *sangeeta mandapa*, which appear to be much later in date than the peak period of the Vijayanagara kingdom. Ramachandran, who first wrote about them, mentions that they were created in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>108</sup> Sivaramamurti, however, considers that these were painted in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and some others in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>109</sup> Although no documentary evidence has yet been found to date these paintings, stylistically speaking, they belong to the later phase of Vijayanagara paintings. An early 18<sup>th</sup> century origin seems more plausible as they appear to be more lyrical and delicately colored than the Shravana Belagola Matha Jain wall paintings, which may have been created later in the same century.

These paintings are in horizontal panels, depicting legends from the Jain *Adipurana*, written in the Tamil *grantha* script, and they illustrate the lives of Tirthankara Vardhamana and Krishna. The center of attention on the ceilings is the painting of an extraordinary Jain *samavasarana*, which combines *sama* and *avasara*—meaning the same opportunity to all to listen to the world's teachers and acquire divine knowledge (Fig. 99).

The first circle of the *samavasarana* represents the wall of this heaven. The second represents a row of pavilions. The third circle is filled with creepers and plants. The fourth circle represents the *upvana bhumi*, forested lands, with trees of uniform shape and size. According to the texts they are supposed to indicate special and peculiar trees like *chuta*, *champaka*, *saptachchada* and *ashoka*, which look very different from each other in reality. *Dhvaja bhumi*, a place where different banners fly, is represented by the fifth circle. The next circle represents a row of formal trees on a red background, which is supposed to indicate the *kalpaka vriksha bhumi*, the world of wish-fulfilling trees. Adjacent to it is the *bhavana bhumi*, the world of feelings, depicting a mansion built of gold and precious stones. The eighth circle is further divided into twelve compartments in which figures of *devas* and *devis*, saints, nuns and *munis* are painted. One of the compartments represents the assembly of the animal kingdom, indicated by the lion and the deer, gathered together to hear the divine words of the Kavalajnani Tirthankara—seated in the central circle. The Kavalajnani himself is supposed to sit facing the east and looking at all sides. In this case he is seated on a golden throne in a frontal pose with eyes focused straight ahead. He is stark naked, with a powerful body whose excellence in *yogic* practices has evened out the musculature. Of the eight motifs associated with the Jain world teacher, the *chauri*, flywhisk; the *chamari*, flywhisk made of yak hair; the *simhasana*, the lion throne; the *bhu mandala*, nimbus, around his head; the parasol above his head; and the *ashoka* tree (almost indecipherable) are visible, but the drum and the flowers being showered over his head are not. The flowers are depicted being poured outside the *samavasarana*. The two white-robed figures standing behind him are the two figures of Indra, the king of gods, holding the *chauri* and the *chamari* over his head. To the west of the *samavasarana* but outside it is located a *mahastambha*, great pillar, supposed to be included within the circle. It represents the removal of pride before entering the world of the *samavasarana*.



The actual iconographic requirement is far from such *mahasthambas*. The innovation in this *samavasarana* is the painting of *gandharvas* showering flowers on it, which according to T. N. Ramachandran is purely for ornamental effect. The artists have achieved excellence, not only through the delicate drawing but through the vivid, though limited, employment, of only red, gold, white and black, which lend great expression and movement to this painting.

The paintings on the ceiling depict the story of Vardhamana's birth, marriage and departure for the forest. He is then painted sitting on a white stone, plucking out his hair after having thrown off his ornaments. In the same panel Vardhamana is shown standing naked on a stone, in the process of a penance called *kyotsarga*, suspension of bodily activity, along with his brothers-in-laws Kaccha and Mahakaccha, who had accompanied him to the forest (Fig. 100). The next panel depicts the prince standing alone while his brothers-in-law, with regrown long hair, and their friends, unable to bear their hunger pangs, try to bring down fruits from a tree with sticks (Fig. 101).

Nami and Vinami, the sons of Kaccha and Mahakaccha, who had been absent when Vardhamana was dividing his kingdom on his renunciation, go to the forest to demand their share of the kingdom (Fig. 102). Vardhamana ignores them and continues in meditation. Indra, seeing their attempts to disturb him, tries to dissuade them. The final panel shows the princes in the Vidhyadhara world under the wish-fulfilling tree, which looks like a dry brown date palm.

There is an illustration of Vardhamana visiting the city to obtain food and being offered grand gifts by the princes. He then visits Hastinapur, the city of Prince Somaprabha. Somaprabha was a very pious man whose younger brother Sreyankumara, had a dream (Fig. 103) in which he saw all the auspicious signs of Jain gods and goddesses, the mountain Mahameru and the wish-fulfilling tree. The paintings show Somaprabha and his brother discussing the meaning of his dream with the royal *purohit*, priest. Mahavira visits them and is loaded with gifts. After his departure from the palace of Somaprabha, Vardhamana is depicted performing his last penances before Kevaljanana, also illustrated in the *samavasarana* discussed earlier. The next sixteen panels are all fairly damaged.

Due to the eclectic beliefs of the time, we find four rows of panels depicting the life of Krishna. His childhood forms the main theme of narration—the paintings are in the same style as those on Vardhamana's life and show greater movement and vibrancy, perhaps because they were unhindered by textual considerations or the formality of consulting patrons. There are also seven indecipherable panels on Neminath Tirthankara.

Stylistically speaking, these paintings on the ceiling of the *sangeeta mandapa* appear to be 18<sup>th</sup>-century creations, legacies of the Nayaka period. Although the theme is Jain and the iconography is predominantly Jain, the headgear and costumes are in typical Vijayanagara style. Similarities can also be noticed with the Hampi Virupaksha Temple in the physiognomy of the human figures, their height, the shape of trees, the style of drawing animals, and the predominance of the color white. The use of draperies and the creation of vertical compositions, also followed in Hampi, is typically Jain. Unlike the later Jain paintings of Shravana Belagola Matha, where the figures are short and thick-waisted, the figures here are elongated in the Vijayanagara style.







## MADURA

Vishwanath, the son of Nagama Nayaka, a minister and close adviser of Krishnadevaraya, established the earliest *nayakdom* in 1559 in Madura. By the time of Vishwanath's death, this *nayakdom* comprised the district of Madura, Ramnad, Tirunelveli, Tiruchchirappali, Coimbatore and Salem. His line continued to be loyal to the Vijayanagara kings up to the time of Tirumala Nayaka (AD 1623–1659) whose support to Ranga III did not help in the continuation of the empire, and Madura became independent *de facto* as well as *de jure*. Tirumala Nayaka is the patron of wall paintings in the Meenakshi Sundareshvara Temple in Madura.

This temple is mentioned in Shaivite devotional literature of the fifth century but its actual construction can be traced back to the eighth century, and major construction work was done during the period 1162 to 1175. It went into neglect during Muslim rule and was restored during the Vijayanagara period. During the Nayaka period the walls of this temple were also covered with wall paintings, most of which have become indistinct. One of the paintings still intact, near the Nadukattu *gopura*, temple tower, represents the marriage of Meenakshi and Shiva. Tirumala Nayaka and his ministers are shown on one side of the painting. The entire composition is rather ornamental and static when compared to the earlier Tamil Nadu paintings or even the Vijayanagara paintings that inspired them, but they certainly introduced a genre that became popular not only in Tamil Nadu but later on also in Mysore.

The Sri Ranganatha Temple in Tiruchchirappali also has wall paintings. One scholar thinks it was built in the fifth century, though the earliest inscription dates to the Chola period of Parantaka I (AD 906–953). It continued to receive grants from later Chola, Pandya, Vijayanagara and Nayaka rulers. Parmasivan seems to think that Vijaya Raghava Nayaka (AD 1633–1673) of Tanjavur commissioned these paintings though Tiruchchirappali was by then under the control of the Madura Nayakas and had been even from the time of Virappa Nayaka (AD 1572–1625).<sup>110</sup> It is unlikely that the Tanjavur ruler would have done this in a militarily stronger neighboring state. A Vishnu temple, it has various mythological tales painted here including Vishnu *avatars*, the *dikpalas*, guardian gods of direction; tales from the *Bhagvata* and *Shiva Puranas*; and famous sages meditating in the forest. There is a remarkably clear painting of Shiva with great attention to detail (Fig. 104). In spite of the excellent state of preservation of the Nayaka period wall paintings of this temple, their quality is perhaps the most inferior and they appear to belong to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The compositions are static and there is not much life or movement in the human figures.

## TANJAVUR

Tanjavur, located at the heart of a prosperous hinterland, virtually the rice bowl of Tamil Nadu, ensured a rich economic resource base for the patronage of art. The Nayakas of Tanjavur were ardent builders of temples and palaces. The most significant Nayaka paintings are found in the Brihadishvara Temple in Tanjavur.

Raghunath Nayaka (AD 1600–1633) was a great patron of art and literature, a tradition continued by the Maratha rulers as well. The Brihadishvara Temple *parikrama* was

*Facing page:*

*Above:*

**102** Nayaka painting,  
Tirupparutikanram,  
Tirupparutikanram Jain  
Temple—Nami and Vinami  
demanding their share of the  
kingdom from Mahavira

*Below:*

**103** Nayaka painting,  
Tirupparutikanram,  
Tirupparutikanram Jain  
Temple—Prince Sreyankumar  
dreaming





పాతాళమండ్లి శ్రీరామమైశ్వర్యముగూచిమిరలిడంగా శాత్రుగతప్రభూమినిపరాహుపమేవైరి  
శ్రీమన్మహారాజప్రేరిపిరుమహాత్మ్యముమిచ్చి





covered with wall paintings executed during the Nayaka period,<sup>111</sup> consisting of illustrations from the *Sthal Puranas*. Many of these paintings have now been removed to reveal the wonderful Chola paintings they had covered. A beautiful painting depicts Vishnu standing in a small tank picking up lotuses. The depiction of Vishnu's bent body is masterly but the size of the lotuses is unrealistically large. These paintings do not appear to have absorbed any elements from the Chola masterpieces over which they were painted.

Among the important temples with wall paintings from the Nayaka period is the Kapadishwara Temple, which has paintings of Shiva performing the Tandava, dance of destruction, and begging alms from sages' wives.

The Marathas started arriving in Tamil Nadu from the time of Shaji Bhonsle—Shivaji's father and eminent general in the Deccani kingdom of Bijapur (AD 1654–1664), who conquered most of the Karnataka territory of the Vijayanagara rulers for Adil Shah of Bijapur. Venkaji, one of his sons, succeeded to his father's estates in Bijapur but started ruling from Tanjavur after 1676.

The Panchandiswara temple paintings from the Maratha period are a stylistic mix of Vijayanagara and Maratha elements.

The paintings in the Durbar Hall of the Tanjavur palace of the Maratha rulers, which currently houses the Saraswati library, were supposedly commissioned by Sarfoji II (AD 1798–1883). It seems that the architect deliberately left large vacant spaces for the purpose. They depict religious themes—Vishnu reclining on Sheshnag and Vishnu in his Krishna *avatara*, accompanied by his queens Rukmini and Satyabhama (Fig. 105). There is also a rich painting of a king with his queens.

As far as the style of wall paintings is concerned, during the period of the Vijayanagara Nayakas and their successors the style is late Vijayanagara, with human figures and expressions drawn in the same fashion as at Madura and Tirupparutikanram. The Marathas were no doubt influenced by the Vijayanagara tradition in the use of draperies, flowing lines of apparel and paintings with borders. The Marathas represent a less sophisticated aesthetic sensibility born out of a rugged rural tradition of guerilla warriors. They were less used to luxurious living, courtly manners, and the finesse of symbolism and euphemism. For them, wealth meant ornamentation, splurging on large wall paintings and iconic and portraiture painting. There was no clear dividing line between the sacred and the secular. Western art also made its first appearance along with the revival of dancing under court patronage. The compositions are generally static and confined usually to one large central figure, who may be surrounded by devotees or consorts.<sup>112</sup> It may however be observed that red and blue dominated both the pre-Maratha and Maratha wall paintings. The lines are thick, and massively built human beings are the norm. The paintings lack musicality and rhythm, in spite of the revival of Carnatic music under the Marathas.

Chidambaram, in the Chidambaram district, is the home of Shiva Nataraja, and there are several temples dedicated to Shiva in the town. The most famous temple, Nataraja, dedicated to Shiva as the king of dance, is of ancient origin. Appar and Sambhandar, in

Facing page:  
104 Nayaka painting,  
Tiruchchirappali, Shri  
Ranganatha Temple—Shiva









105 Nayaka painting, Tanjavur,  
Sarfoji's palace, Durbar Hall—  
Krishna with his queens Rukmini  
and Satyabhama



106 Chidambaram, Nataraja Temple—Vishnu in his Mohini form and Shiva in his Bhikshatana form





their Devarama hymns composed in the seventh century, mention nearly 500 Shiva temples in Chidambaram, but they do not specifically mention the Nataraja Temple. Manikavachakkar, a great devotee of Shiva, who is thought to have lived in the ninth century, is supposed to have mentioned the name of this temple. Shankara, said to have lived during 788 to 820, is believed to have presented a crystal *linga* to this temple, which again confirms its existence in the ninth century. The earliest inscriptions are dated to Rajaraja I, Rajendra I and Rajendra II.<sup>113</sup> It was thus definitely in existence in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the Chola kings donated money, land and jewels to this temple. The Pandyas also followed suit. The Chit Sabha, "hall of consciousness", of this temple contains several colonnades, and on one of them, near the passage around the saint Chandikeshvara, wall paintings can be seen.

The single wall painting in the Chidambaram Temple still extant appears to belong to the Nayaka style of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and depicts Shiva in his Bhikshatana or beggar form (Fig. 106). Shiva's elegant form enchants the women of the village, and several scantily dressed women attended by their maids look at Shiva very coyly and shyly. This angers the sages whose wives have fallen like ninepins to the charms of Shiva, and they are illustrated performing a *yagneya*, sacrifice, to destroy Shiva. Along with Shiva is the beautiful form of Vishnu's Mohini *roop*, female form (Fig.106). Both of them set out to distract the sages' and their wives' concentration on *bhakti*, devotion, by seducing them with beautiful male and female figures and destroying their *bhakti* through lust, so that they do not complete their *yagneya* against Shiva.

The panel's elegance lies in the attention to the details of the women's hairstyles and ornamentation. There is great movement in the entire painting, indicated through the almost dancing figures of the ladies, while even Shiva's posture is that of a male dancer. There are similarities with the late Tirupparutikanram paintings in the borders of the paintings, the use of draperies, the hairstyles, the shapes of the trees and the way compartments are indicated, but the richness of color in the Chidambaram panel is missing at Tirupparutikanram.

#### PERUMAL CHENAMARAYYA TEMPLE

The ninth-century Perumal Chenamarayya Temple contains late Nayaka period paintings on the *Ramayana* theme. These imaginative paintings, which appear to belong to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, show the influence of folk art in conception and design. At the entrance is a large painting of Vishnu's Virat *roop*. The conflict between Rama and Ravana is depicted in great detail. Two interesting paintings depict Hanumana bringing Rama's message to Sita in the Ashoka *vatika*, garden, in Ravana's palace and Hanumana bringing the hill containing the life-saving *sanjeevani* plant for the wounded Lakshmana. Finally, the chariots of Rama and Ravana confront each other, showering arrows on each other in a graphic representation of the theme. The lines are thick but they still retain the lyricism and movement of the late Vijayanagara period.

It is possible that many temples in Tamil Nadu had wall paintings, but unlike the marvelous heritage of sculpture, there are very few remains of wall paintings. The existence of the Nayaka period wall paintings points to the fact that wall painting was a continuous tradition and that it is the ravages of time that have obliterated the paintings from most centers.



## MYSORE

Mysore, in the state of Karnataka, boasts of an ancient tradition of wall painting—Cave III of Badami had been painted as early as the sixth century AD by the Chalukyas. No remains of medieval wall paintings have been found, though Someshwar, a 12<sup>th</sup>-century ruler of Kalyana, mentions the decoration of houses. They had a tradition of illustrated manuscripts—and we have the illustrated manuscripts of Dhavala, Mahadhavala and Jayadhavala, which were painted and taken to Moodbidri. The wall painting tradition seems to have been revived during the Vijayanagara period, when Karnataka came into its own. The extant remains, however, belong to the Nayaka period.

The credit for reviving the art of wall painting goes to Raja Wodeyar (AD 1578–1617) of Mysore. He was a Nayaka, a feudatory of the Vijayanagar royal house, a powerful and resourceful man endowed with a love for art. He is supposed to have rehabilitated several families of painters of the Vijayanagara School at Srirangapatna. He went to the extent of building a temple to Nimishambi Devi, the tutelary deity of the painters belonging to the Kshatriya Raju community. The patronage of art was to continue in his family. Tipu Sultan, the son of Haidar Ali carried on this tradition in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## SHRAVANA BELAGOLA JAIN MATHA

Shravana Belagola is a well-known Jain pilgrimage center known from the time of Chandragupta Maurya—who migrated here with his guru Badrabahu—and is a place known for observing the Jain *sallekhana*, a rite of ritual suicide. It is also famous for the Jain sculpture representing Gomateshwara, the son of Jain Tirthankara Adinath, built in AD 981. Several Jain monasteries were built here. Many of the *bhattarakas*, leaders, and monks living here were men of great learning who wrote literary texts as well as religious books. They also encouraged and solicited gifts and land for the *mathas*. From our point of view they were also patrons of painting. Several Mysore School glass paintings of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and sculptures produced for the last thousand years are found here.

A Jain *matha* here contains the best Jain wall paintings of the Nayaka period (Fig. 112). According to C. Settar the Jain poet, Anantakavi mentions this *matha* and its paintings in his book *Gommati Vistara*, written in 1780.<sup>114</sup> The panel depicting a Dassehra procession of Krishna Raja Wodeyar III (AD 1799–1868) may have been painted to coincide with his visit to the *matha*. Architectural and sculptural evidence indicate a date somewhere in the third quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The thematic content of these paintings is an assemblage of many tales and subtales, primarily glorifying the life of Parshavnath, who was to become one of the greatest Tirthankaras. The marriage of Parshavnath's parents, King Ashvasen and Queen Vama, is shown in its entire splendor, with the participants decked in grand jewelry (Fig. 107). The actual marriage ceremony is similar to the painting of Shiva and Parvati's wedding in the Virupaksha Temple (Fig. 85).

The subsequent paintings depict Queen Vama dreaming of the impending birth, the ensuing celebration, and the visit of Indra and Sachi for the Janam Abhishekham, or birth ceremony (Fig. 108).





107 Mysore, Shravana Belagola  
Jain Matha—The marriage of  
Princess Vama





108 Mysore, Shravana Belagola  
Jain Matha—Indra blessing Queen  
Vama's newborn child

The colors are vibrant, and the crowns and leg postures typical of the Vijayanagara period. Parshavnath is painted at his *tapasya* in the forest, surrounded by wild animals, including the tiger that is the present incarnation of his brother Kamath in a previous birth. In another panel Kamath in his birth as a tribal is painted aiming an arrow at Parshavnath, who remains calm, and is shown in meditation in a *samavasarana* having attained *kevaljnana*, perfect knowledge (Fig. 109). The *samavasarana* is simpler than the one at Tirupparutikanram. Parshavnath's previous life as Marubhuta, a general in a king's army, is the subject of a set of paintings. As the story goes, Marubhuta had a younger brother called Kamath who raped his brother's wife while the brother was at war and was therefore exiled by the king. When Marubhuta returns from war having heard his brother's plight he goes to recall him from the forest (Fig. 110) Kamath kills his brother with a rock. The coronation of Parshavnath, a later incarnation of Marubhuta is then shown (Fig. 111), and finally his participation in a procession (Fig. 112).





The *Naga Kumara Charitra* is the subject of a series of paintings that show how a prince fell into a well at birth, was protected by a king cobra, was raised by a humble village couple, and went on to claim his royal legacy. There are also paintings of him taming wild elephants and fighting the armies of his opponents (Figs. 113, 114). There is great excitement in these panels, which show princes being informed of Naga Kumara's impending invasions, cities falling to his attacks, an elephant resting on the way (Fig. 115), the local populace welcoming him, and finally his army expanding with everybody joining him in his successful march to his father's capital (Fig. 116).

The third major subject, and from many points of view the most interesting, depicts the procession of Neminath through a bazaar. It is likely that this was an actual event in which the citizens of Shravana Belagola participated. Of note is the fact that the bazaar is painted in three vertical panels, in the last of which are women selling grains and

**109** Mysore, Shravana Belagola  
Jain Matha—Parshavnath  
meditating





108 Mysore, Shravana Belagola  
Jain Matha—Indra blessing Queen  
Vama's newborn child

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**109** Mysore, Shravana Belagola Jain Matha—Parshavnath meditating







vegetables (Fig. 117). There are also a few individual panels of gods, demons and Krishnaraja Wodeyar III's Dassehra procession.

These paintings show vestiges of the inheritance of Vijayanagara art in the headdresses—especially the crowns—royal and divine figures, ornaments and thick-waisted human figures. Stylistically, they definitely appear to belong to the Jain painting of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although the artists have not adhered to its rigid norms, bringing in their own innovations. The eyes of the human figures are typical of the Jain painting of this period, big and wide-open but not protruding from the face. The drawing of the landscape is also typically Jain, though the artists' repertoire of trees is much larger than in most Jain wall painting centers. There are brown, leafless trees; lush, green trees (Fig. 109), and beautiful ornamental trees (Figs. 113, 114). The animals are also quite realistically drawn. Buildings, both the homes of the common people and the palaces of royalty, are simply drawn and rely on the draperies for ornamentation, typical of the Jain paintings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The classical and folk elements occasionally merge in these paintings, as in the inclusion of the figure of a demon mentioned earlier. No other wall painting in the old Mysore state comes anywhere near achieving the expression of these paintings. There seems to be no trace of Maratha influence in Shravana Belagola. Although the Marathas attacked



*Facing page:*

**110** Mysore, Shravana Belagola Jain Matha—Kamath poised to throw a rock at his brother

*Left:*

**111** Mysore, Shravana Belagola Jain Matha—Marubhuta invited by the people to ascend the throne

*Following pages:*

*Page 134:*

**112** Mysore, Shravana Belagola Jain Matha—A Tirthankara's procession

*Page 135:*

**113** Mysore, Shravana Belagola Jain Matha—Prince Nagakumara's warriors

*Page 136, above:*

**114** Mysore, Shravana Belagola Jain Matha—Prince Nagakumara's warriors

*Page 136, below:*

**115** Mysore, Shravana Belagola Jain Matha—An elephant, detail of Fig. 114

*Page 137:*

**116** Mysore, Shravana Belagola Jain Matha—Nagakumara's procession after his victory



























Karnataka frequently during this period they did not settle there in large numbers. The paintings of Shravana Belagola have their closest links with the Mysore School of paintings. It is possible that during the rule of the Wodeyar family many artists came to the area to settle in Srirangapatnam, where an artist village still exists. In any case, wall paintings existing in some of the temples of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Mysore School show the awareness of this art form in this region.

Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar (AD 1799–1868) gave great encouragement to this art by commissioning wall paintings in the Jagmohan Palace, Mysore. Most of the extant paintings found as icons for worship and for decorating houses and palaces belong to his reign. He was a scholar and musicologist who wrote many books, the most famous among them being the *Sangandhika Parinayam*. He not only commissioned paintings, temples and palaces but also the *Sri Tatva Nidhi*, a pictorial digest of ancient learning in the art of painting that contained many iconographic representations of gods and goddesses.

The example of royal patronage of painting was emulated, and several houses had wall paintings done in them. Paintings also existed in *bhajan mandirs*, places where people gathered to sing devotional songs. The common people bought painted icons of gods and goddesses.

A number of eminent painters' names are available from all over Karnataka, but especially from the areas that came in contact with the Vijayanagara empire, for instance, Jevgal Narasimhaiah from Halebid, and Durgada Krishnappa, whose ancestors were employed by the Nayakas of Chitradurga—who served Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar.

#### PRASANNA VENKATRAMANA TEMPLE

The Prasanna Venkatramana Temple in Mysore, was built by Prasanna Venkatramana, a priest employed by the royal house of Wodeyar. He built a spacious house in Mysore city, with a small temple at its entrance, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the paintings in this tiny temple have been destroyed by the burning of incense. A room on the terrace, however, is covered with wall paintings, which are well preserved. Vishnu predominates in these paintings. He is painted in his Rama *avatara* shooting arrows at a hidden foe and attending Sita's *swayamvara* (Fig. 119). Krishna, his other popular *avatara*, is also depicted as an infant lying on a leaf, as a young cowherd stealing the clothes of the *gopis* (Fig. 120) and finally aiming arrows at his adversaries while sitting on an elephant composed of women, called *kunjara kamini* (Fig. 121). The portraits of various Maharajas of Mysore add a touch of grandeur. The drawing and the coloring of these wall paintings is similar to the Jagmohan Palace of Mysore.

#### NARASIMHA TEMPLE

The Muslim feudatories of the Wodeyars and Tipu Sultan carried on the wall painting tradition. Nalappa, a Muslim descendant of Tipu Sultan, who was also his *faujdar*, feudatory general, constructed the Narasimha Temple in Seebi in the Tumkur district, about 80 miles from Bangalore. The architectural dimensions of this temple, dedicated to Vishnu's Narasimha *avatara*, clearly point to its late provenance, apparently in the early half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The ceiling of the main *sangeeta mandapa* in front of the



*garbhagriha* is covered with paintings. The central panel in front of the *garbhagriha* contains a large, powerfully modeled, ferocious painting of Vishnu's Vishwarupa. The teeth protrude and there are figures painted on his legs as in the Alchi and Sumtsek sculptures of Buddha. Around this main figure are representations of Vishnu's *dashavataras*, ten incarnations.

Rama's fight against Ravana seems to be a favorite theme, depicted with great vivacity and movement, as foot soldiers chop off heads with swords and fire arrows at each other. Sita is carried back to Ayodhya in a *palki*, palanquin (Fig. 122), indicating victory. Other paintings in this temple are devoted to Krishna.

Another unusual set of paintings depicts the Great War at Kurukshetra, with Arjuna, hands folded, requesting Krishna's advice before the battle in the central panel (Fig. 123). Around the central panel, in an exciting and unique depiction, are rows of princes with their foot soldiers, cavalry, elephant and camel corps all converging on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

118 Mysore, Seebi Tunkur district,  
Dariya Daulat Bagh







119 Prasanna Venkatramana  
Temple—Sita's *swayamvara*



There is also an odd assortment of panels on both religious and secular themes. The patron also seems to have commissioned panels on Tipu Sultan, painting him walking in front of a caravan, seated on an elephant leading his army, and walking in a forest that looks almost like an Henri Rousseau painting. A folk element seems to have made its way into these paintings, especially those on the Kurukshetra war, as is evidenced by, for instance, the size of Arjuna's horse in proportion to his own size.

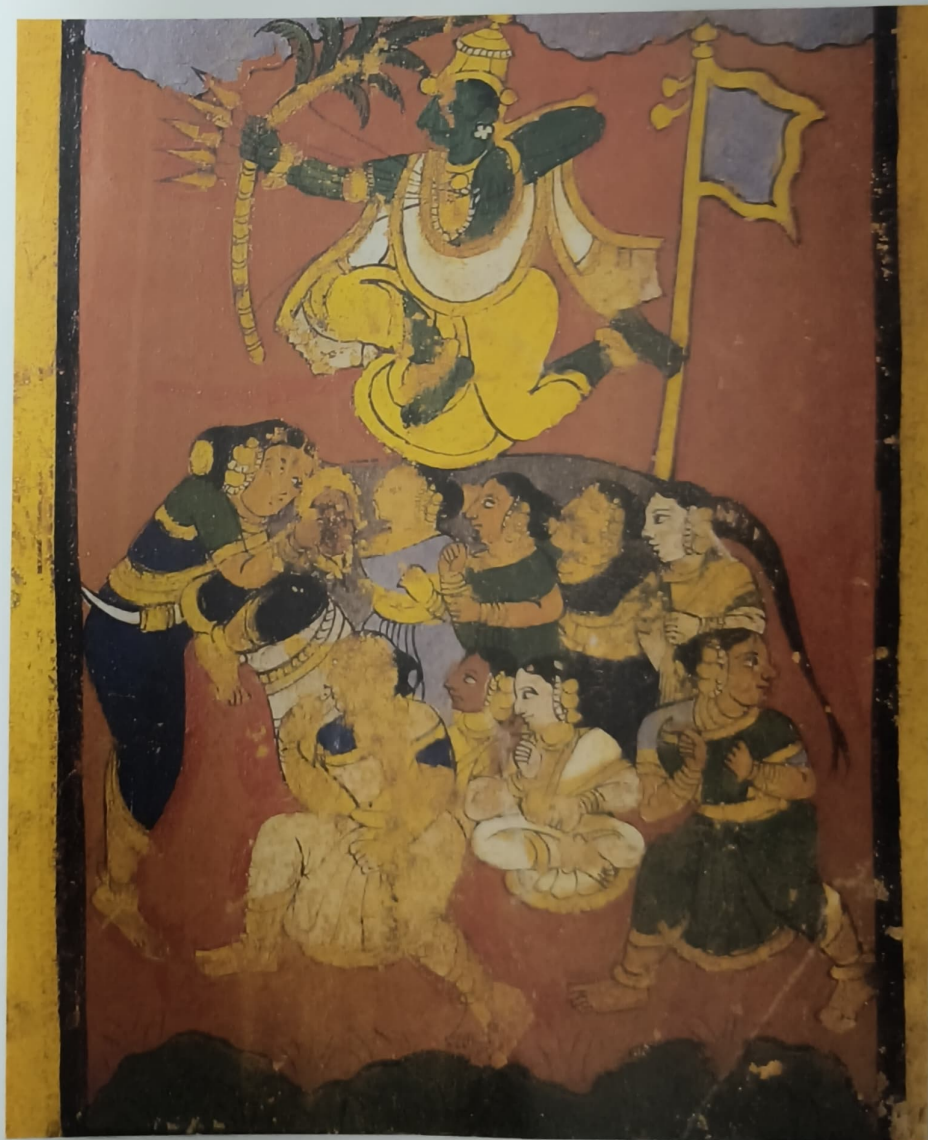
The Dariya Daulat Bagh (Fig. 118), the garden palace built as a summer residence for Tipu Sultan and his family in 1784, boasts wall paintings on its outer facade and inner rooms. The rooms have the floral designs of the later Mughal paintings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while the outer walls have both ornamental floral scrolls and depictions of the events of the time. It is believed that the immense battle scenes on the outer right wall were commissioned by Lord Wellesley, the British governor-general, when he had the building repaired after the conclusion of the Anglo-Mysore wars of 1799–1804, to depict

Left:

**120** Mysore, Srirangapatnam, Prasanna Venkatramana Temple—*Krishna Leela*

Right:

**121** Mysore, Srirangapatnam, Prasanna Venkatramana Temple—*Kunjara kamini*







*Above:*

**122** Mysore, Seebi Tunkur,  
Narasimha Temple—Rama  
fighting a *rakshasa*



*Below:*

**123** Mysore, Seebi Tunkur,  
Narasimha Temple—Krishna  
driving Arjuna's chariot



the British victory over Tipu Sultan. Apparently, some British troops were stationed here after their victory, and some paintings were destroyed. Lord Dalhousie (AD 1812–1860) ordered their restoration and the Mysore Wodeyars commissioned further restoration work in 1926, followed by the ASI's restoration efforts in 1959.

In view of the repeated restoration work it is very difficult to date these paintings. The beautiful floral designs near the ceiling in the interior and on the south central wall of the outer veranda retain most of their original colors and their elegance. The two huge battle scenes on the outside veranda seem to be in the Company style, especially in the formations of the troops and the depiction of grass. The compositions are formal and static and lack any expression of terror or ferocity of combat (Fig. 124), leading to the belief that they were painted circa the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The left veranda wall has both vertical and horizontal panels showing Muslim aristocrats sitting in garden pavilions, and scholars in discussion (Fig. 125). An interesting panel even depicts courtesans from different regions. It is interesting that even in this remote corner an attempt was made to create a Muslim ambience through white marble pavilions, buildings and Persian *chinar* trees. This is remarkable because they could have seen only Hindu wall paintings in this region.

A broad sweep of the Nayaka painting that spread across Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka brings to light indicators of the stylistic uniqueness of Nayaka painting. Firstly, despite the existence of prior wall painting traditions from the times of the Pallavas, Pandyas, the Cholas in Tamil Nadu, and the Chalukyas in Karnataka, these traditions have had no perceptible influence on the Nayaka genre of paintings—with the possible exception of the Nataraja Temple at Chidambaram, where the delicacy of line and the subtlety of color is reminiscent of Pallava painting.

The influence of Jain painting can be detected both in Hindu temples and in Jain *mathas* in the shape of the eyes, the trees and minor architectural norms, as in the paintings in the Prasanna Venkatramana Temple, the Seebi Temple, and the Chenamarayya Temple in Tamil Nadu.

The Vijayanagara style of painting seems to have had the greatest influence on Nayaka painting. This influence is seen not only in the costumes, headgear and ornaments of the human figures but also in their forms; though less voluminous and slimmer-hipped than before, their movement is depicted in the same way as in Vijayanagara paintings (Fig. 86). Maratha influence can be seen in the brighter colors of the Saraswati Mahal library, Tanjavur, and the Jagmohan Palace, Mysore, in the tradition of Maratha *pattachitras*—but it is not enough to indicate a style different from the late Vijayanagara.

Following pages:

Pages 144–145:

**124** Mysore, Srirangapatnam, Dariya Daulat Bagh—Tipu Sultan's forces

Pages 146–147:

**125** Mysore, Srirangapatnam, Dariya Daulat Bagh—Discussion among scholars

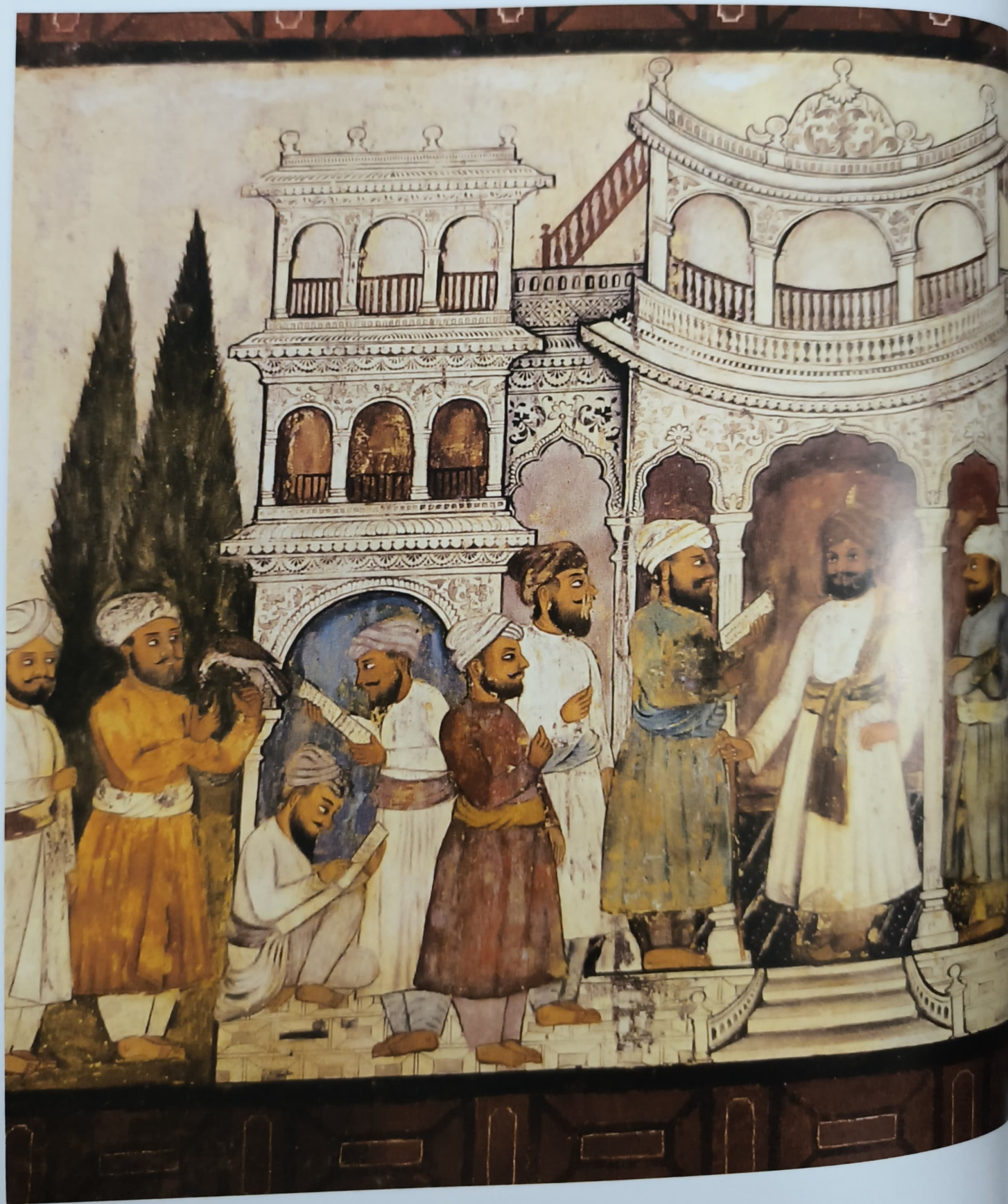




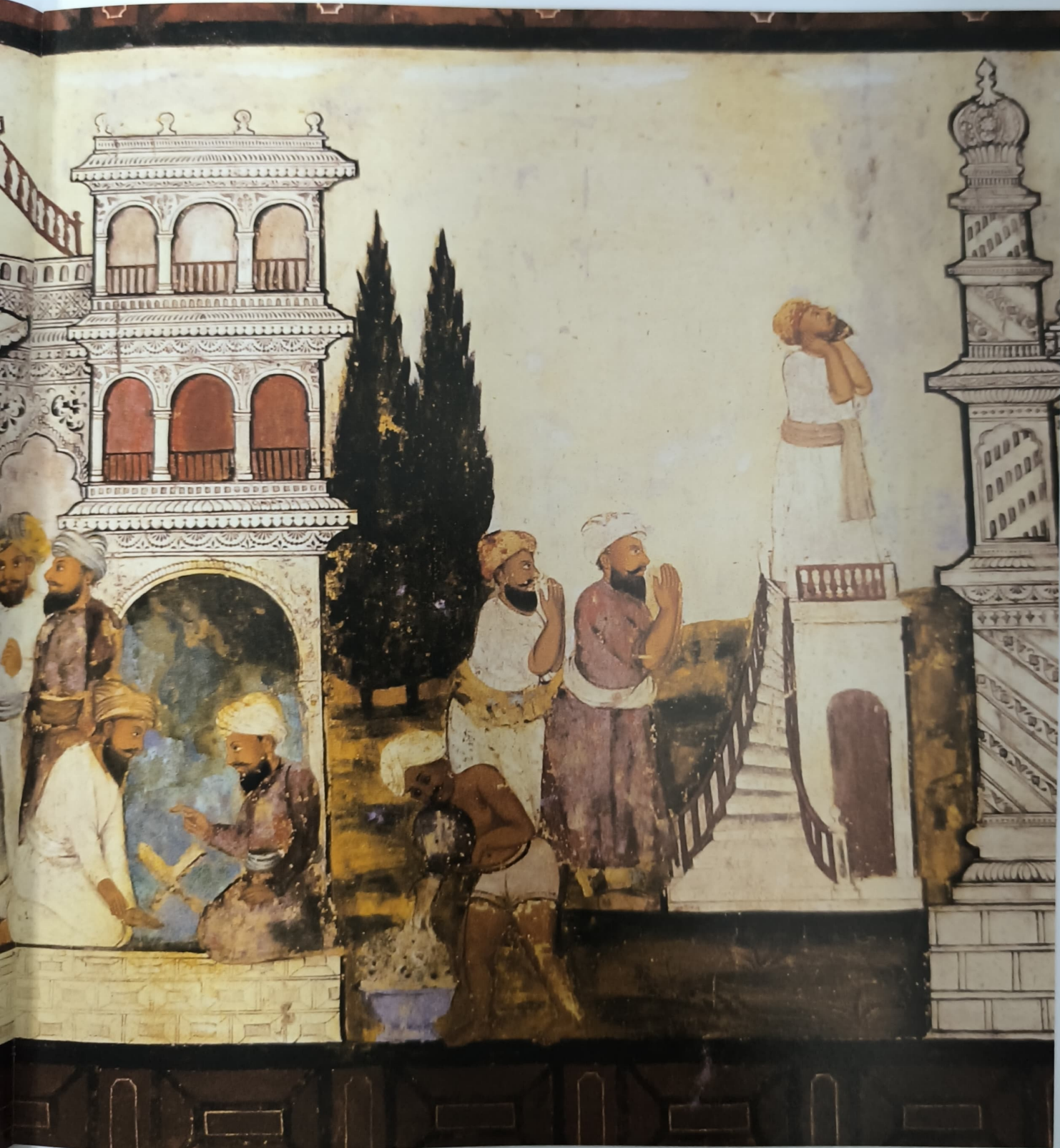














## KERALA PAINTING

The Cheras ruled in Kerala in the third century BC. They seemed to have been the most prominent kingdom here until the sixth century AD. The Chalukyas of Badami are reported to have conquered north Kerala during the sixth and the seventh centuries. The Pallavas attacked and defeated them from the west in the sixth and the seventh centuries, the Pandyas in the seventh and the Rashtrakutas in the eighth century. Under the Kulashekharas of Mahodayapuram (AD 800–1102), foreign attacks seem to have ended, to be renewed again under the Cholas in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when parts of Kerala were annexed to the Chola empire. Besides the Kulashekharas, the Kolathiris of Kolathund and the Zamorins of Calicut rose in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the Perumpadappu Swarupams of Cochin in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Vijayanagara kingdom invaded Kerala, annexing some parts of it. The Nayakas of Madura attacked it in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Kerala however, became powerful during the rule of Martand Varma (1729–1758) and Kartika Tirunal Rama Varma (1758–1798). The former expanded the state and the latter preserved it during the Mysorean invasion.

Kerala is a very interesting mix of religious influences. In the beginning, tribal gods and goddesses were worshipped, including the Goddess Kottavai,<sup>115</sup> a war goddess. Jainism, Buddhism and Classical Hinduism prevailed here from very early times. The latter became predominant during the Sangam age and after the revivalist movement of Shankracharya (AD 788–820). The Bhakti movement produced several poets like Kulashekhara Alvar; Cherumal Perumal Naynar; Tunchat Ezhuthchan who wrote *Adhyatam Ramanayanam*, *Mahabharatam* and *Harinam Kirtanam*; and Puntanam Nambudiri who wrote *Shri Krishna Kamamritam*, *Santanagopalam* and *Gnanapana*. They encouraged and inspired the arts of temple building and wall painting. Christianity arrived in AD 52, the Jews in AD 68 and Islam with the Arabs and under Tipu Sultan.

Social life in Kerala was marked by a high degree of gender equality. Although most ruling houses were patriarchal, a large body of Nairs, the warrior arm of Kerala, followed a matrilineal inheritance system, and there are several cases of queens ruling in Kerala. There was great respect for learning, and the opening of schools attached to temples and *mathas* was stressed.

The rich tradition of Kerala wall painting was made possible by a strong economic resource base. The Greeks, the Romans, the Phoenicians, and the Persians traded in spices taken from Kerala. Arab trade was to assume great importance, especially in the economy of the Malabar Coast, beginning from the eighth century onward. They enriched the Zamorins of Calicut, even manned their navy and supplied horses to Vijayanagara.<sup>116</sup> Quilon and, later on, Calicut, were important centers of trade with China. Marco Polo mentions trade between China and Kerala.<sup>117</sup> Ibn Batuta (AD 1342–1347) also refers to the prosperity of Calicut and the existence of merchants there from all parts of the world. He further states that men from China, Sumatra, Ceylon, the Maldives, Yemen and Fars visited there.<sup>118</sup> The accounts of Abdur Razzak, who visited Kerala in 1343, and Nicolo Conti, who went there in 1444, also refer to the rich pepper trade of Kerala.<sup>119</sup>



The Portuguese, who came at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the Dutch and the British in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century and the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, prospered greatly with the spice trade and also brought prosperity to Kerala. The development of ports during the various periods of Kerala's history shows its economic and trading contacts. While in the earlier centuries of the Christian era, Muziris, Tyndis, Nelcynda are mentioned, Naiva acquired importance during the Chola period, along with Vakal and Pantar. During the medieval and middle period, Quilon, Calicut, Cragnore and Cochin rose to great prominence as centers for trade with the Arabs, the Chinese, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British.

Kerala's ancient and extensive spice trade ensured a strong economic resource base, which led to the development of temple architecture on a large scale and made possible its rich wall painting tradition. The cave temples came first, of which only Tirumandikkarai, contemporary with the Pandya caves, contains the remains of wall paintings. Massive structural temples were built from the time of the first phase of Kulasekhara rule from the ninth to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and continue to be built even today. They are Dravidian in style, with large sculptures, and many of the outside walls of the *garbhagrihas* have paintings. Sivaramamurti believed that the wall painting tradition started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>120</sup> while the archaeologist H. Sarkar dates the paintings to 1691, when the Pallimanna Temple was built.

The district of Trichur houses some of the earliest wall paintings, starting with the Pallimanna Shiva Temple, which has the most enchanting painting of Krishna playing the flute for Shiva and Parvati. The Vadakkunatha Temple, which is one of the largest temples in Trichur, has two sets of paintings, one on the interior of the boundary wall and another set in a small shrine. The oldest painting belongs to the interior boundary wall and depicts Vishnu in a majestic form (Fig. 127).

The Trivanchikulam Shiva Temple, supposed to have been built during the rule of the Kulasekharas, has many wall paintings in a state of deterioration. Stylistically, they appear to belong to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Shiva is painted with Parvati and as Shiva Nataraja. There is also an impressive painting of a powerful seated Vishnu (Fig. 128). Krishna playing the flute is depicted with a beatific smile and a powerful, muscular body (Fig. 126).

The Varkar Shiva Temple on the road from Trichur to Guruvayur, also contains a few 18<sup>th</sup> century wall paintings, most of which have become indecipherable. Still visible is a panel of Shiva as a mighty warrior and Devi from the *Markandeya Purana*, destroying demons. The Chemmanthatta Temple of Shiva, also in Trichur district, has sculptures of Krishna and Balarama at its entrance. A beautiful peacock is decipherable, but most of the other paintings have become indistinct (Fig. 131).

The Rama Temple at Triprayar is the other important temple of Vishnu containing wall paintings, which Sivaramamurti believes were executed in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. They do not appear to be earlier than the Trivanchikulam paintings; they may indeed be late 18<sup>th</sup> century if we go by the excessive ornamentation. The main theme of illustration is Rama. In one of the panels, he is shown wearing a crown, with Sita by his side (Fig. 129). There are also panels on Vishnu and Krishna.

Following pages:

Page 152:

**126** Trichur, Kumblanand Pallimanna Temple—Krishna playing the flute

Page 153:

**127** Trichur, Vadakkunatha Temple—Vishnu













128 Trivanchikulam, Shiva  
Temple—Vishnu





129 Tripriyar, Rama Temple—  
Rama and Sita after their  
coronation



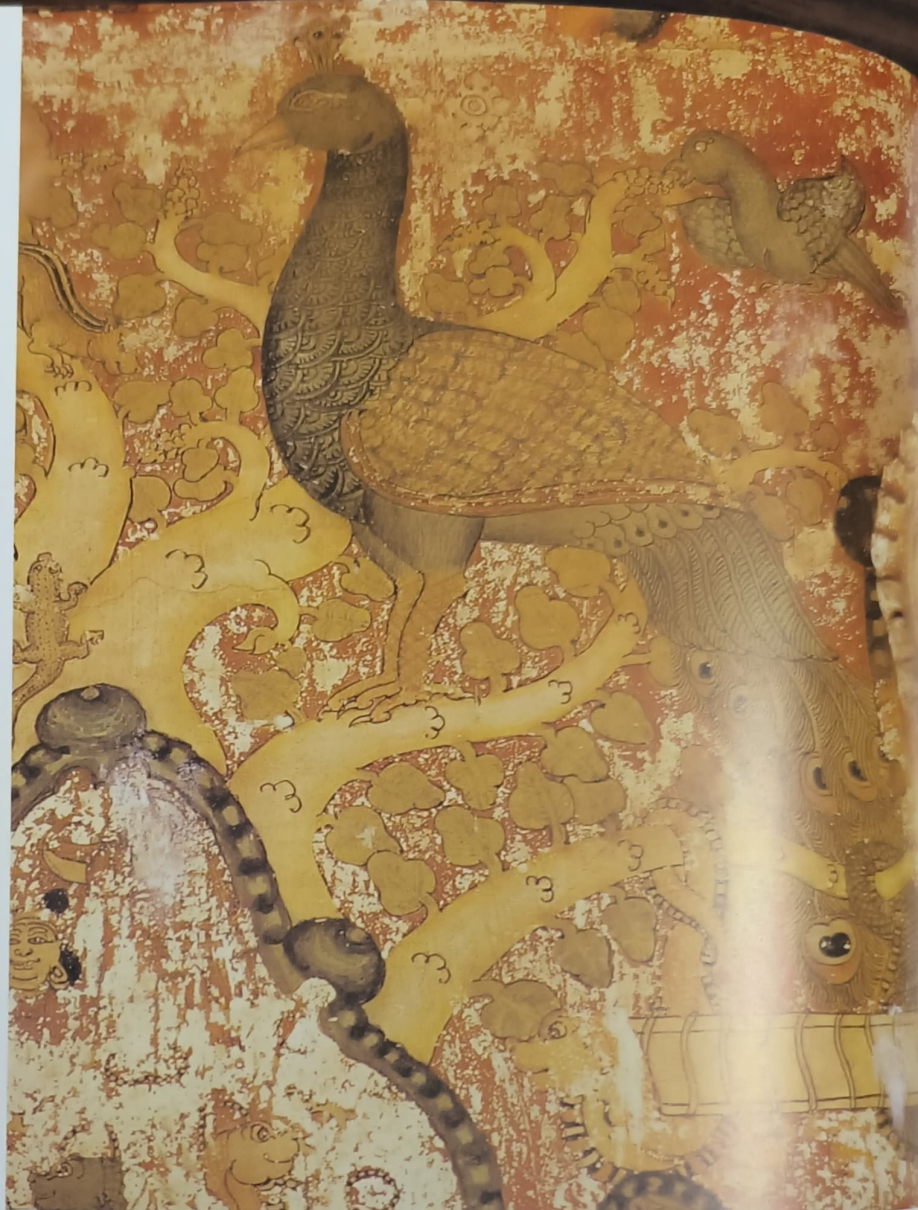


Left:

**130** Trivanchikulam, Shiva Temple—Vishnu

Right:

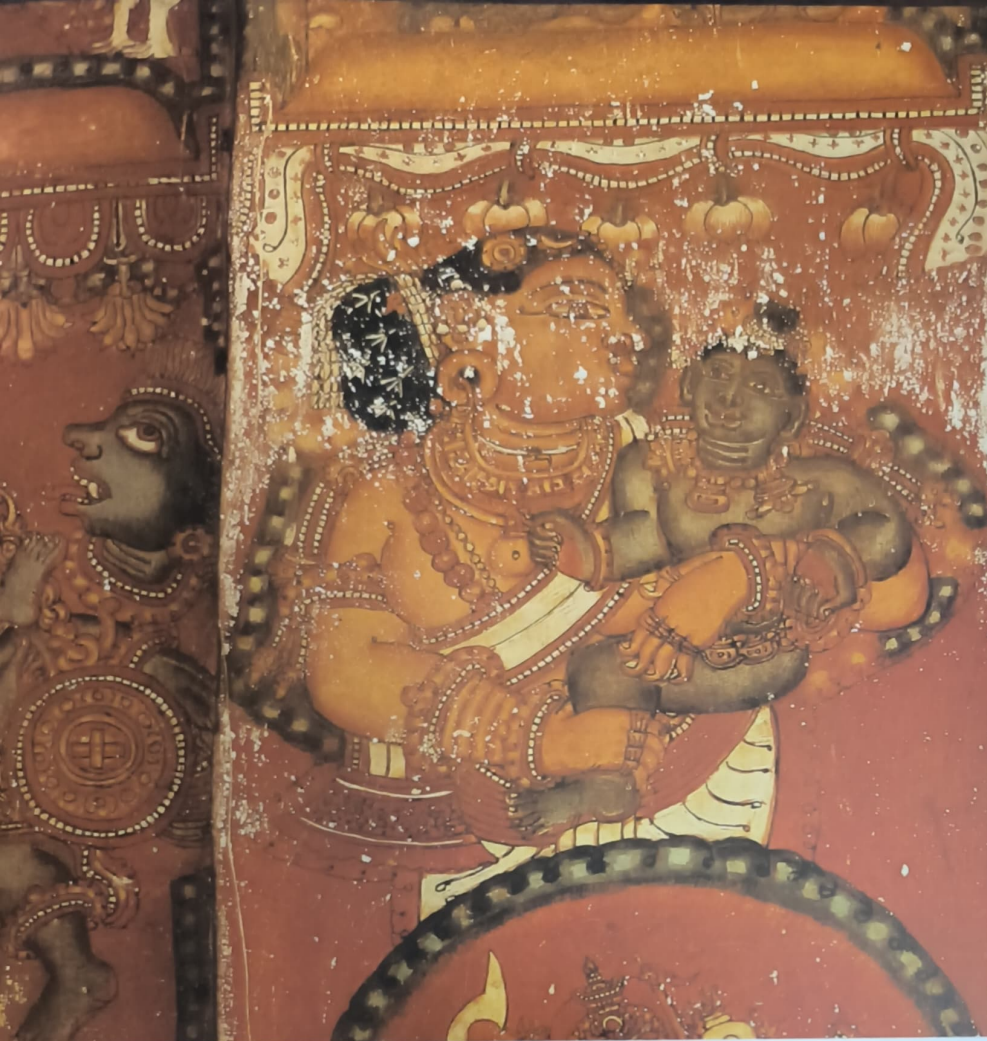
**131** Chemmanthatta Temple—A peacock



The most famous shrine in Kerala, namely Guruvayur, is also located in Trichur district. As in the case of most other shrines, an ancient origin is assigned to it, but it appears to be a 16<sup>th</sup>-century building. The *garbhagriha* of this temple and its entrance have scenes from Krishna's childhood. They seem very sophisticated, but as they have been repainted it is difficult to assign them to a period earlier than the later 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The district of Alleppey has many temples with wall paintings, of which the Aranmula Parthasarthy Temple is the oldest. It has many wall paintings, which have become indistinct except a few which depict Ganesha, Narasimha and Krishna. The Marathiavolom Temple, near Alleppey town, built by local villagers—as stated by Vellodor Moos, a Nambudiri—has many paintings on the Krishna theme. An exquisite panel shows the infant Krishna tied by a rope to a pillar, by his mother Yashoda—who watches him with her friends while he makes efforts to break free—to prevent him from stealing butter. There are a number of trees painted here, which are usually found in North Indian painting and do not belong to this area. Most of the figures are expressive and full of movement.





*Above:*

**132** Alleppey, Pundareekpuram  
Temple—Krishna with Yashoda

*Below:*

**133** Alleppey, Pundareekpuram  
Temple—Krishna and Balarama in  
Nanda's lap







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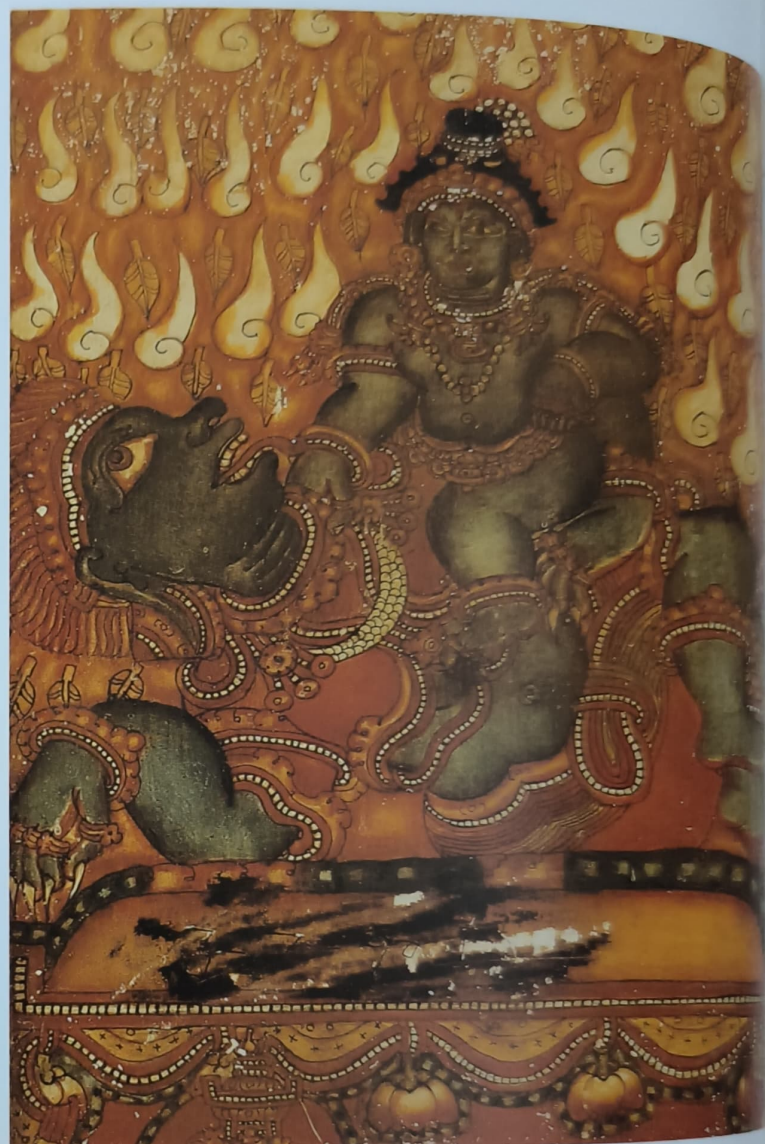
**134** Alleppey, Pundareekpuram Temple—Putana arriving at Nanda's home

*Above right:*

**135** Alleppey, Pundareekpuram Temple—Putana being sucked to death by Krishna

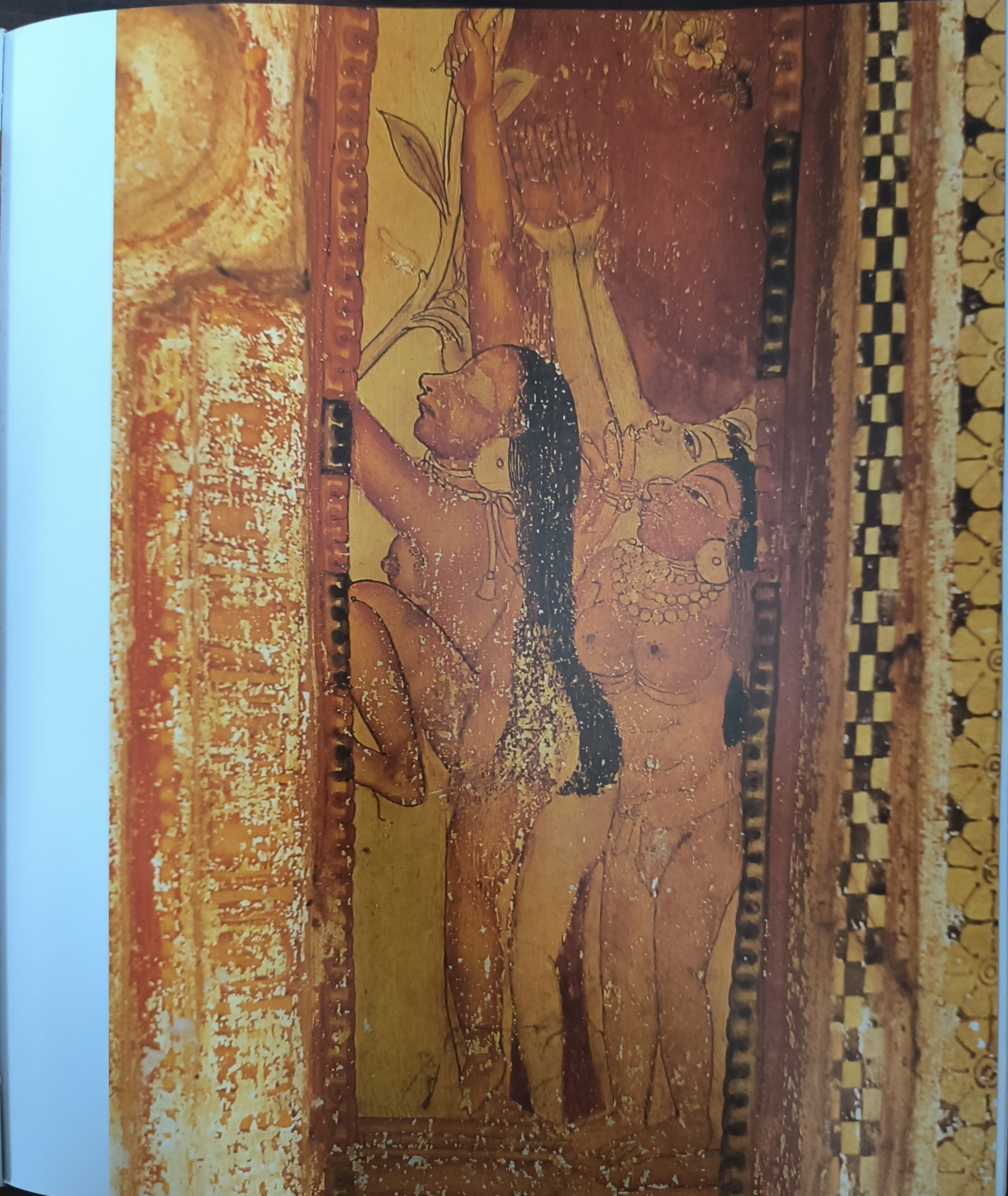
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**136** Alleppey, Pundareekpuram Temple—A *gopi* trying to climb a tree to reclaim her clothes



The Pundareekpuram Temple, also in Alleppey district, has the best wall paintings in this district. The temple, dedicated to Vishnu, is believed by the local populace and the priest to have been built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by a Nambudiri Brahmin family. It has a number of well-preserved wall paintings, which on stylistic grounds appear to be late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century paintings. The artists relished painting Krishna's life in Vrindavana. He is depicted as an infant in the arms of his foster mother Yashoda (Fig. 132) and with his brother Balarama—in the lap of his foster father Nanda (Fig. 133). Also painted in three panels is the death of the demoness Putana, who was sent to poison the infant Krishna—from her arrival at the door (Fig. 134), a depiction of her standing near the cradle, to being sucked to death by Krishna (Fig. 135). Other paintings show Krishna stealing butter, stealing the *gopi*'s clothes (Fig. 136), and playing the flute (Fig. 1). Also painted are Narasimha, Ganesha, *devis*, and sages (Fig. 137). Pundareekpuram has a few secular illustrations, which are so rare in Kerala. In one of the panels a beautiful *nayika*

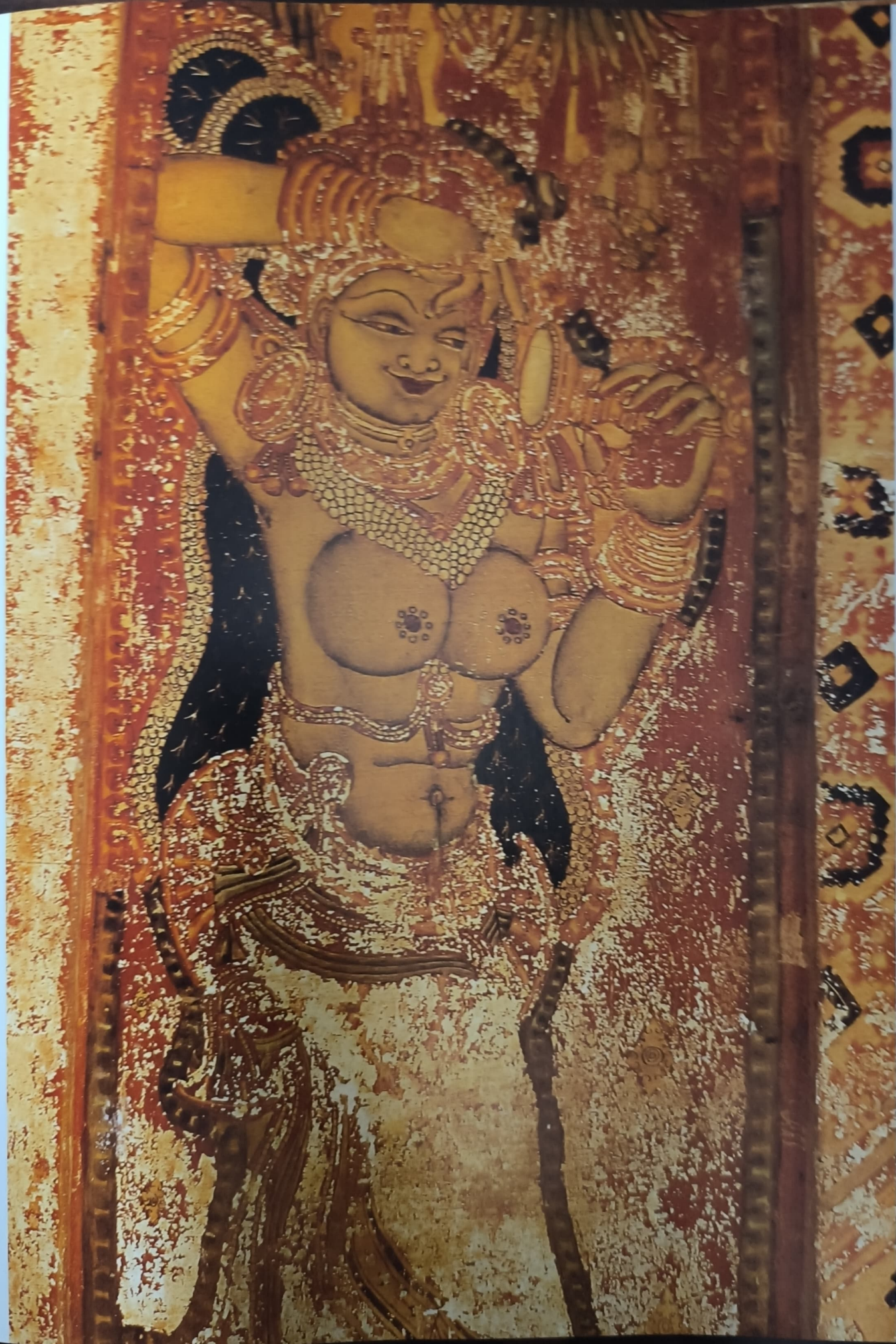














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Page 160:

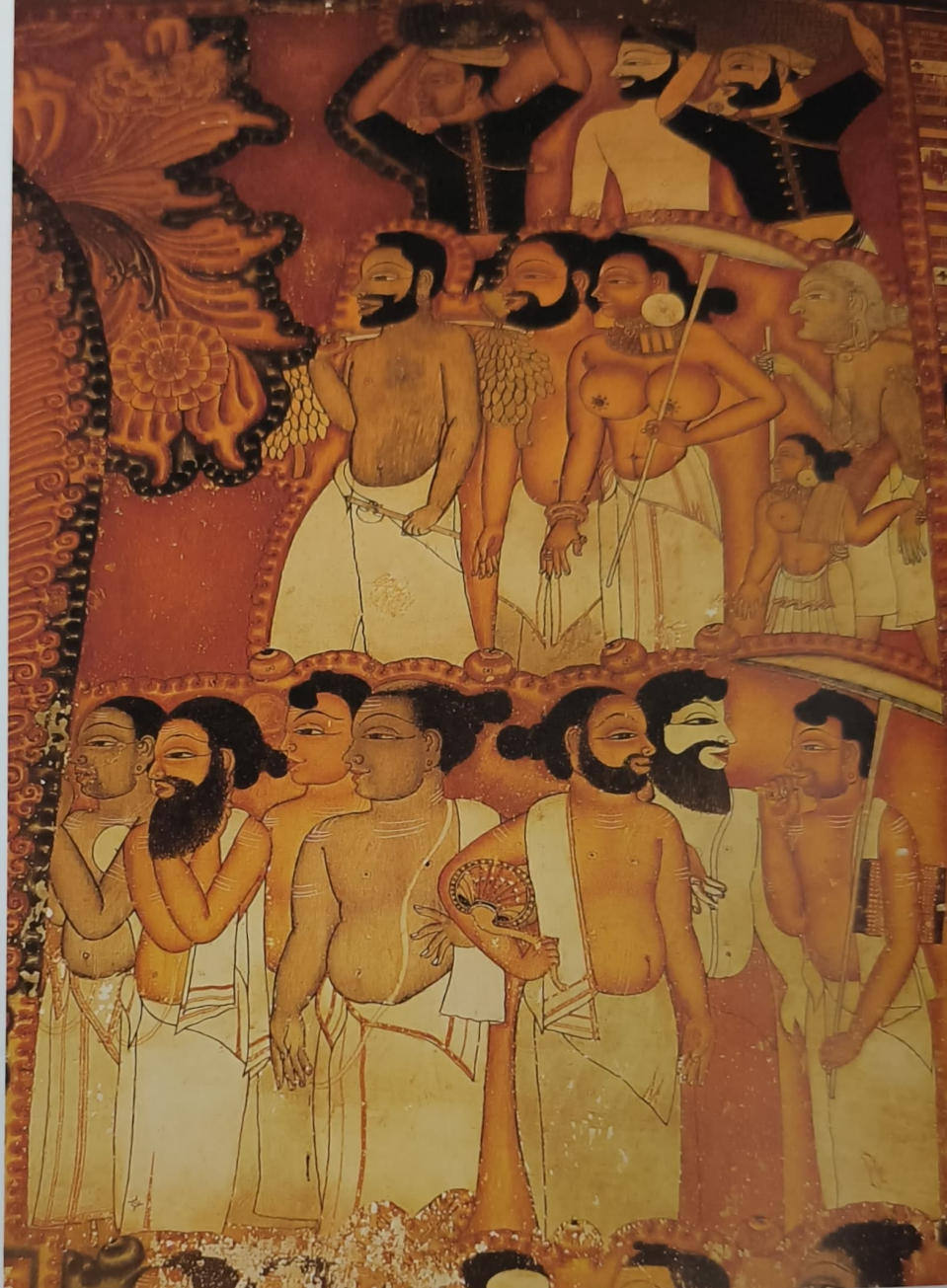
137 Alleppey, Pundareekpuram

Temple—A sage

Page 161:

138 Alleppey, Pundareekpuram

Temple—A *nayika* looking at her  
face in the mirror



looks at her face in a mirror (Fig. 138), while in another an angry *nayika* points her finger at her tormenter. Other panels have Brahmins going on pilgrimage (Fig. 139), cooking food and supervising rituals. There is a great deal of color, movement, rhythm and expression in the paintings of Pundareekpuram.

Sarkar lists 26 temples with wall paintings in the Kottayam district. In many of these, however, the paintings are almost indecipherable. The earliest paintings are at the Ettumanur Temple, which Sivaramamurthy dates to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century—as there is evidence indicating that the temple was renovated in 1548<sup>121</sup>—though there is no proof to indicate that the wall paintings were done at that time. Their close resemblance to the 18<sup>th</sup> century wall paintings of Mattancheri in neighboring Trichur would indicate, on stylistic grounds, a mid-18<sup>th</sup> century dating. The temple has four large painted panels at the entrance. The wall on the left has an unusual, expressive depiction of wild elephants and tigers in a forest being chased by hunters on foot, holding spears (Fig. 140). On the

Above:

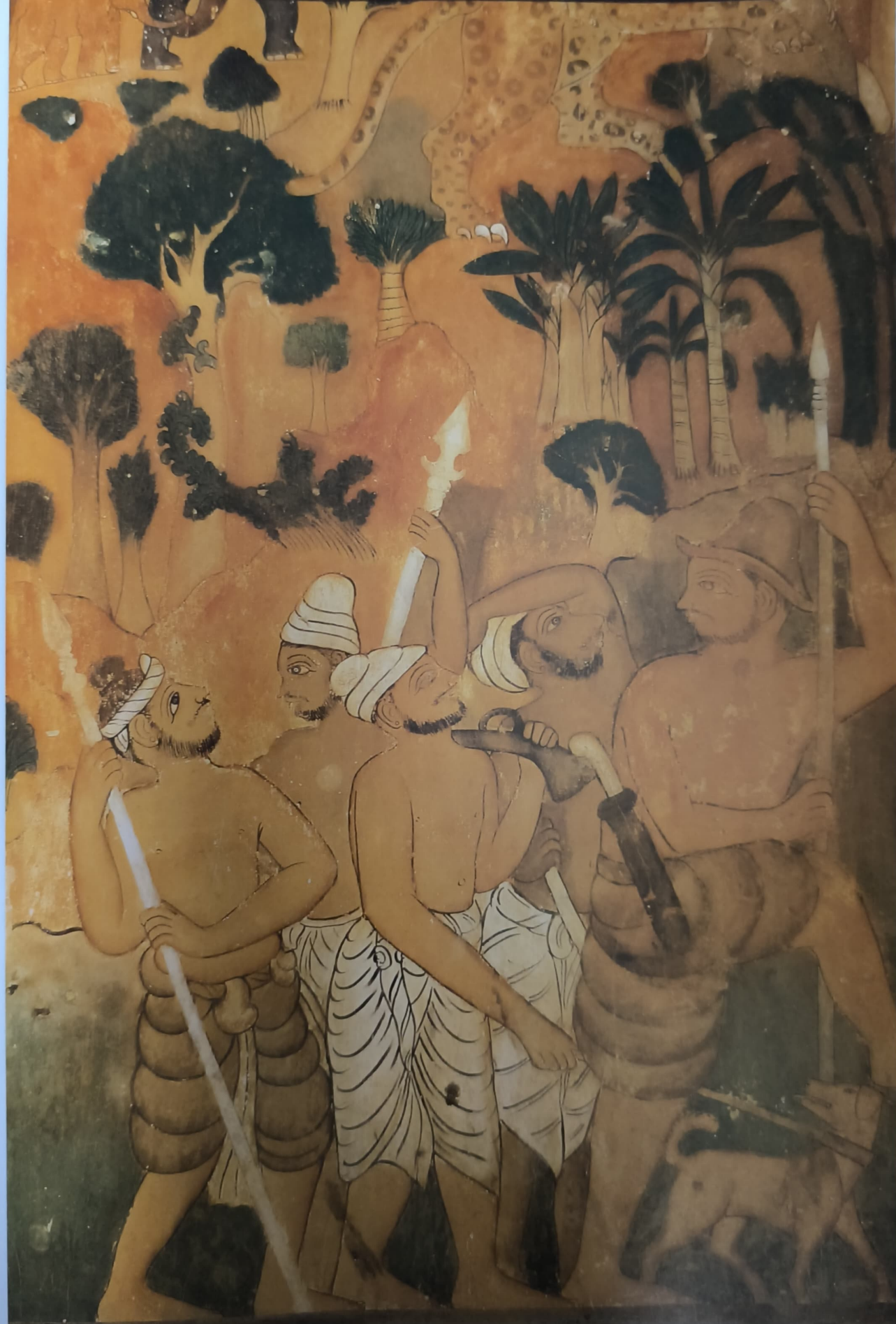
139 Alleppey, Pundareekpuram

Temple—Brahmins proceeding on  
pilgrimage

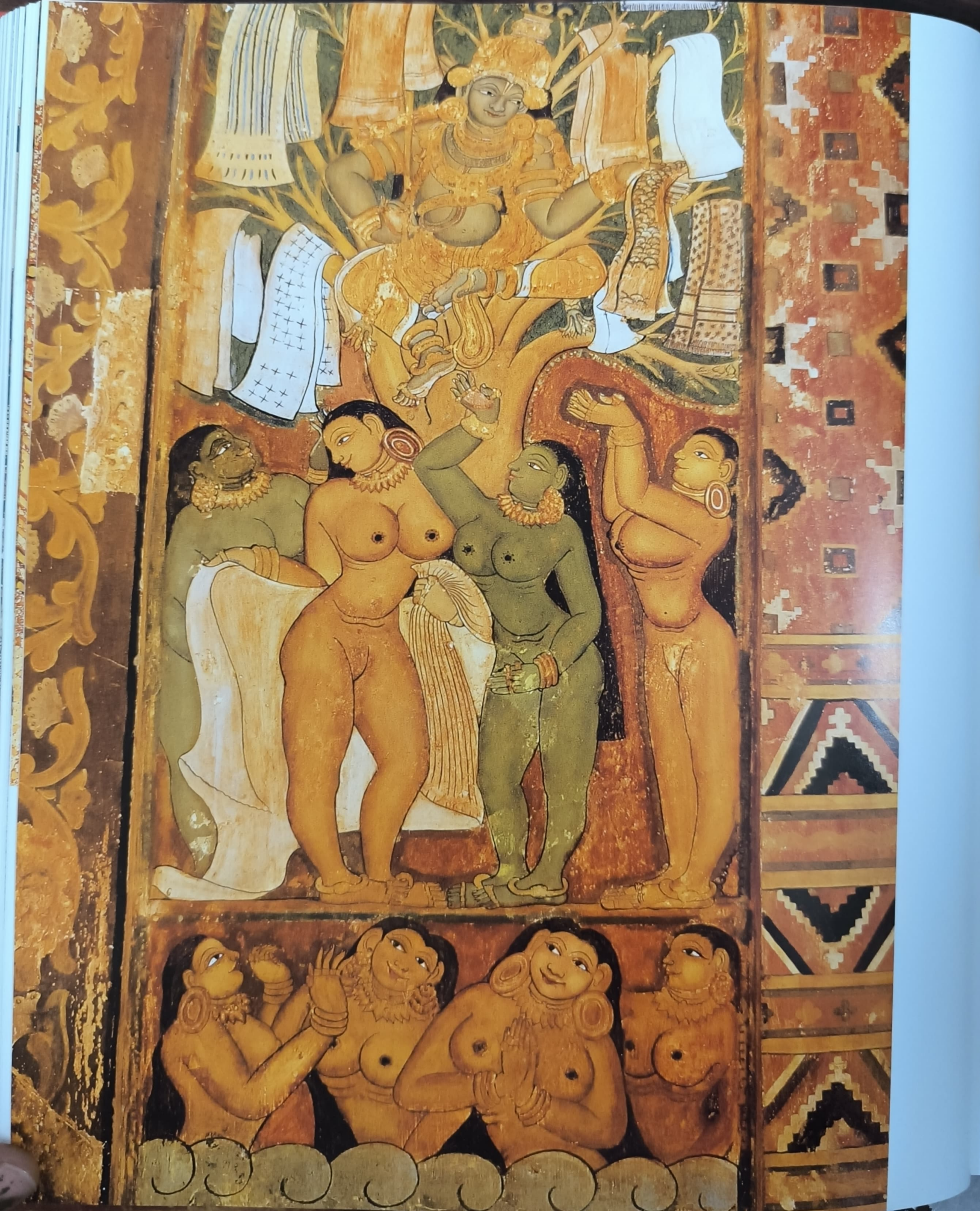
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140 Kottayam district, Ettumanur  
Temple—Hunters













other side of the entrance is a depiction of the *vastraharana*, stealing of clothes, theme. In keeping with the Kerala tradition of painting, the bodies are muscular and even Krishna perched on a tree is rather heavy. The *gopis* are, however, unique, almost like female forms of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century—tall, muscular, and completely unselfconscious (Fig. 141). A panel above has Shiva standing on a drum, but it lacks the finesse of the *vastraharana* panel and may be a late 19<sup>th</sup> or even a 20<sup>th</sup> century addition.

The interior wall of the *parikrama* has two huge panels. One of them has a beatific Vishnu in his Seshayi form lying on a snake while reverential attendants look on (Fig. 142), and the other is a large painting of Shiva Nataraja watched by Nandi, Kartikeyan and his peacock, and several goddesses (Fig. 143). The latter panel has great musical resonance, with the whole world seemingly moved by the rhythm of Shiva's dance.

Kottayam district has many temples with 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century wall paintings. Two Subhramanya temples at Kudamaloor and Udayanapuram have unremarkable paintings of Devi, Krishna, and Subhramanya. An inscription in the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Kumari Temple at Kumaranallur tells us that wall paintings were created here in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These were renovated in 1997. Of these, the one of Shiva trampling a demon creates a baroque effect (Fig. 144).

The Vaikom Mahadeva Temple, also in Kottayam district, reportedly built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 148), has beautiful, well-preserved late 18<sup>th</sup>-century wall paintings. These seem to have been coordinated with the sculptures, and some of the sculptures look

Facing page:

141 Kottayam district, Ettumanur Temple—*Gopi vastraharana*

Above:

142 Kottayam district, Ettumanur Temple—Vishnu lying on the snake Seshasayi





*Above left:*

**143** Kottayam district, Ettumanur  
Temple—Shiva Nataraja watched  
by his devotees

*Above right:*

**144** Kottayam district, Kumari  
Temple—Shiva dancing the  
Tandava







like the paintings. Paintings of Shiva with a *trishul* in his hand (Fig. 146), doing the Tandava, holding his bow ready to shoot, standing besides Parvati (Fig. 147), in his Ardhanari-shvara form or seated in a dark corner, all display strength symbolic of his role as a destroyer of evil. Two of the panels depicting Parvati, and a panel depicting Lakshmi and Vishnu (Fig. 148) also use modeled muscular forms. Most of these paintings exude martial qualities and display a kind of baroque effect.

The Pandava Sasta Temple near Kottayam also has a few wall paintings, most of which appear to be mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, a date also supported by a painted inscription mentioning that the paintings were done in 1844 by Narayanapattar, a resident of Thiruvananthapuram *desam*. Only two panels—Krishna playing the flute for his queens, and Devi—are visible.

A few other temples in Kottayam, like the Thaliyal Shiva Temple, the Aimanam Narasimha Temple, the Tirumakkasa Shiva Temple and the Tirikoditanam Krishna Temple, are also reported to have wall paintings.

Above:

**145** Kottayam, Vaikom Temple

Following pages:

Page 168:

**146** Kottayam, Vaikom Temple—  
Shiva

Page 169:

**147** Kottayam, Vaikom Temple—  
Shiva and Parvati

Page 170:

**148** Kottayam, Vaikom Temple—  
Vishnu and Lakshmi

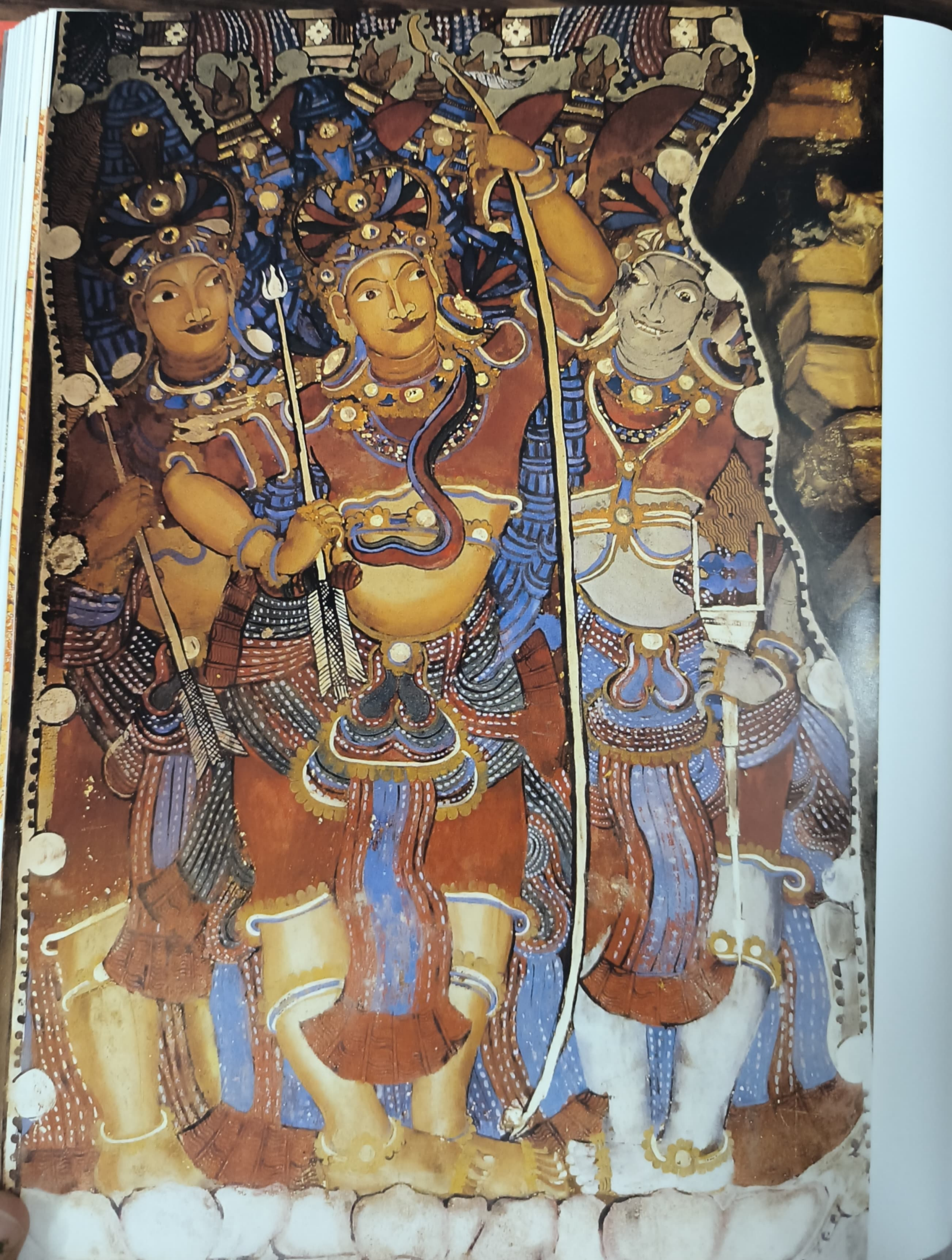
Page 171, above:

**149** Padmanabhapuram,  
Padmanabhapuram Palace  
Temple—A wall in Vishnu's shrine

Page 171, below:

**150** Thiruvananthapuram,  
Padmaswami Temple—Shiva

















The next major concentration of temples with wall paintings is in Thiruvananthapuram district. The oldest center of wall paintings here is the Sri Krishna Temple at Attingal, about 37 miles from the city of Thiruvananthapuram. This temple was reportedly built by Chitra Tirumal Maharaja. A few distinct panels, which seem to belong to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, have Krishna playing the flute, surrounded by *gopis* and cows.

The Padmanabhaswami Temple in Thiruvananthapuram town is one of the largest temples in Kerala in the true Tamil Nadu Dravidian style. It was built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and added to later on. It has a large number of paintings on the outer walls of the *garbhagriha* of the Vishnu and Narasimha shrines. Most of the panels have been repainted, the exceptions being some figures of Devi at the top. As befits a Vishnu temple, Vishnu's various *avataaras* and scenes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are the most popular subjects. A refreshing panel depicts Iccha Devi and a figure of Shiva (Fig. 150). Most of these panels are large, and the representative element is more predominant than any aesthetic subtlety of drawing or painting.

The Tiruvattar Temple, though now located in the Kanniyakumari district of Tamil Nadu, also has Kerala-style wall paintings. The temple is dedicated to Vishnu and the outer walls of the inner shrine were completely covered with paintings, though most of them now appear to be damaged. There are a few figures of Vishnu, Shiva, Devi, Ganesha,











*Facing page:*

**151** Padmanabhapuram,  
Padmanabhapuram Palace Temple—  
Vishnu Seshasayi

*Above:*

**152** Padmanabhapuram,  
Padmanabhapuram Palace Temple—  
The royal family and their preceptor  
paying homage to Lakshmi







Narasimha, and Krishna. There are also Brahmins performing *havana*, worship through lighting a fire, and *acharyas*, spiritual guides, being taken in procession. They appear to be late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century paintings.

The richest and some of the most beautiful paintings are in three palaces in Kerala. All of them appear to have been painted in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. The Padmanabhapuram Palace has the best paintings. The palace itself, according to the Department of Archaeology of Kerala state, was built in 1550. It is generally believed that the exquisite wall paintings in the Vishnu shrine in this palace (Fig. 149) are evidence of the great taste of Martanda Varma, one of Kerala's greatest rulers, who was an administrator, a warrior, a patron of scholars and poets, and a great aesthete. The focus of the shrine is a large painting of Vishnu recumbent on Seshnaga. Lamps have been lit around him and he is watched at the top by adoring gods and sages (Figs. 151). Three large panels of his consort Lakshmi also decorate this room. The best one faces the large panel on Vishnu and shows Devi seated on a pink lotus with the Maharaja, the Maharani, the heir apparent and the royal guru standing with folded hands in front of her (Fig. 152). Near Vishnu's figure is another panel of Lakshmi, painted in darker shades and lacking the delicacy of the first panel. Also painted is Gaja Lakshmi, Lakshmi adored by elephants.

Other striking panels depict scenes from the *Krishna Leela*, while an exquisite Yashoda, painted in profile nursing the infant Krishna, is one of the most beautiful paintings of women in South Indian painting (Fig. 153). There is alertness as well as a delicate expression of tenderness. The *gopis*, in another arresting panel of Krishna playing the flute, are exquisitely drawn (Fig. 154). There is a great musical quality in this painting, reminiscent of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* illustrations in paintings from Orissa. The ambience of a forest in Vrindavana has also been very lyrically created.

Shiva is the next most popular subject of painting in this shrine. He is shown seated with Parvati on a throne, with their two children (Fig. 155). There is also an unusual painting of Shiva's *linga* form, which unlike most representations of the *linga* is white, with eyes and a nose marked on it (Fig. 156).

There are a number of other gods and goddesses, and a row of dancers, standing very like the Leepakshi ladies (Fig. 157). One panel celebrates Ganesha *puja*, worship, with his devotees bringing grains, bananas and cooking the food meant as an offering (Fig. 158).

The color and drawing of these paintings indicates two styles, with the worship of Devi, and Yashoda nursing the infant Krishna, stylistically different from the other darker panels. Not only do they have a more sensitive and lyrical impact, the drawing, the modeling of human figures and the coordination of color in these paintings are unsurpassed in Kerala.

The Krishnapuram Palace, used as a summer palace by the Travancore rulers is a superb example of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Kerala architecture. Its large rooms have beautiful carved wooden ceilings. Two of the walls of the veranda at the back have wall paintings. The largest panel, which may have been retouched, depicts the adoration of Vishnu, the family deity

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**153** Padmanabhapuram,  
Padmanabhapuram Palace  
Temple—Yashoda and infant  
Krishna

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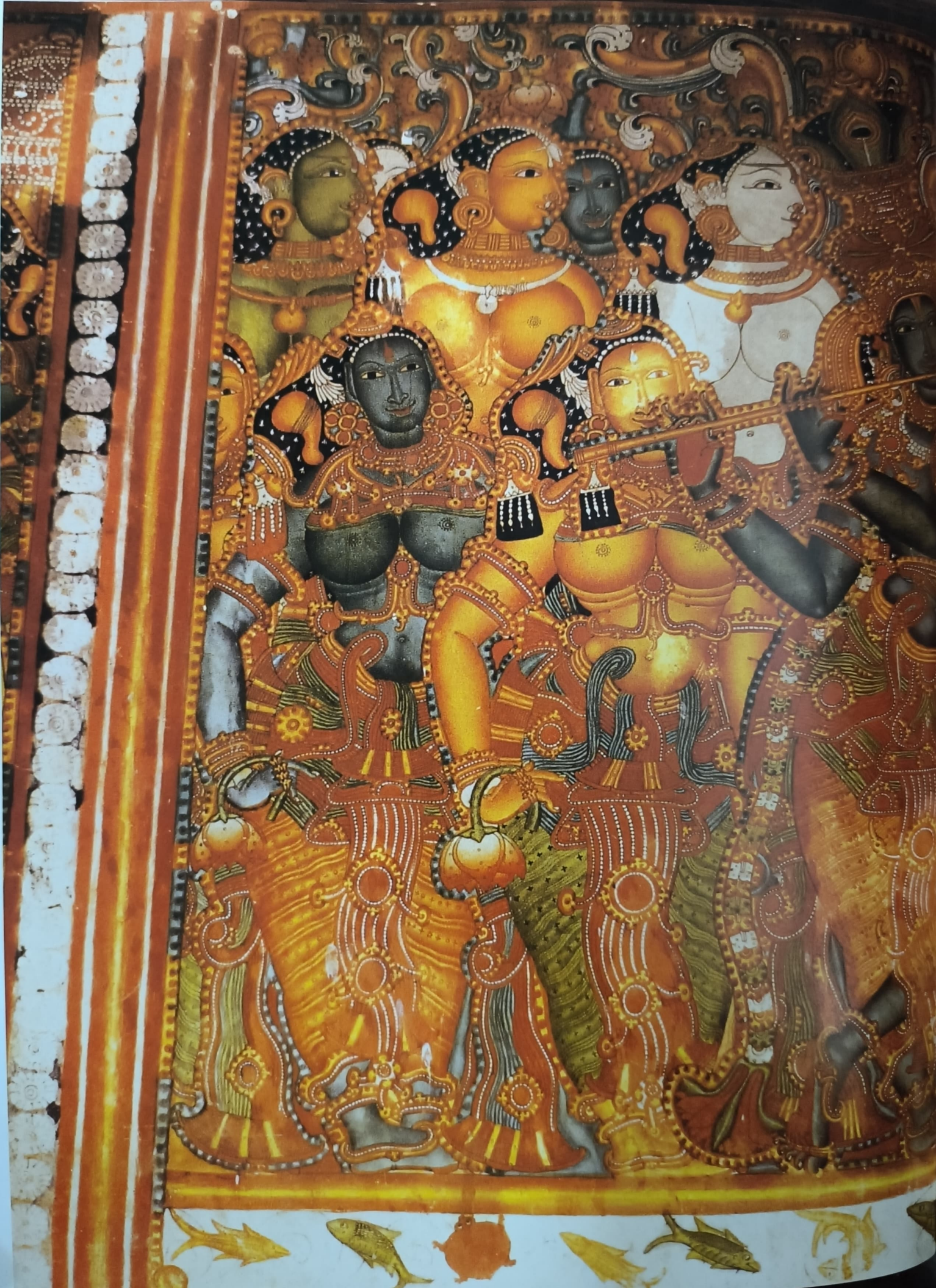
*Page 176–177:*

**154** Padmanabhapuram,  
Padmanabhapuram Palace  
Temple—Krishna playing the  
flute for the *gopis*

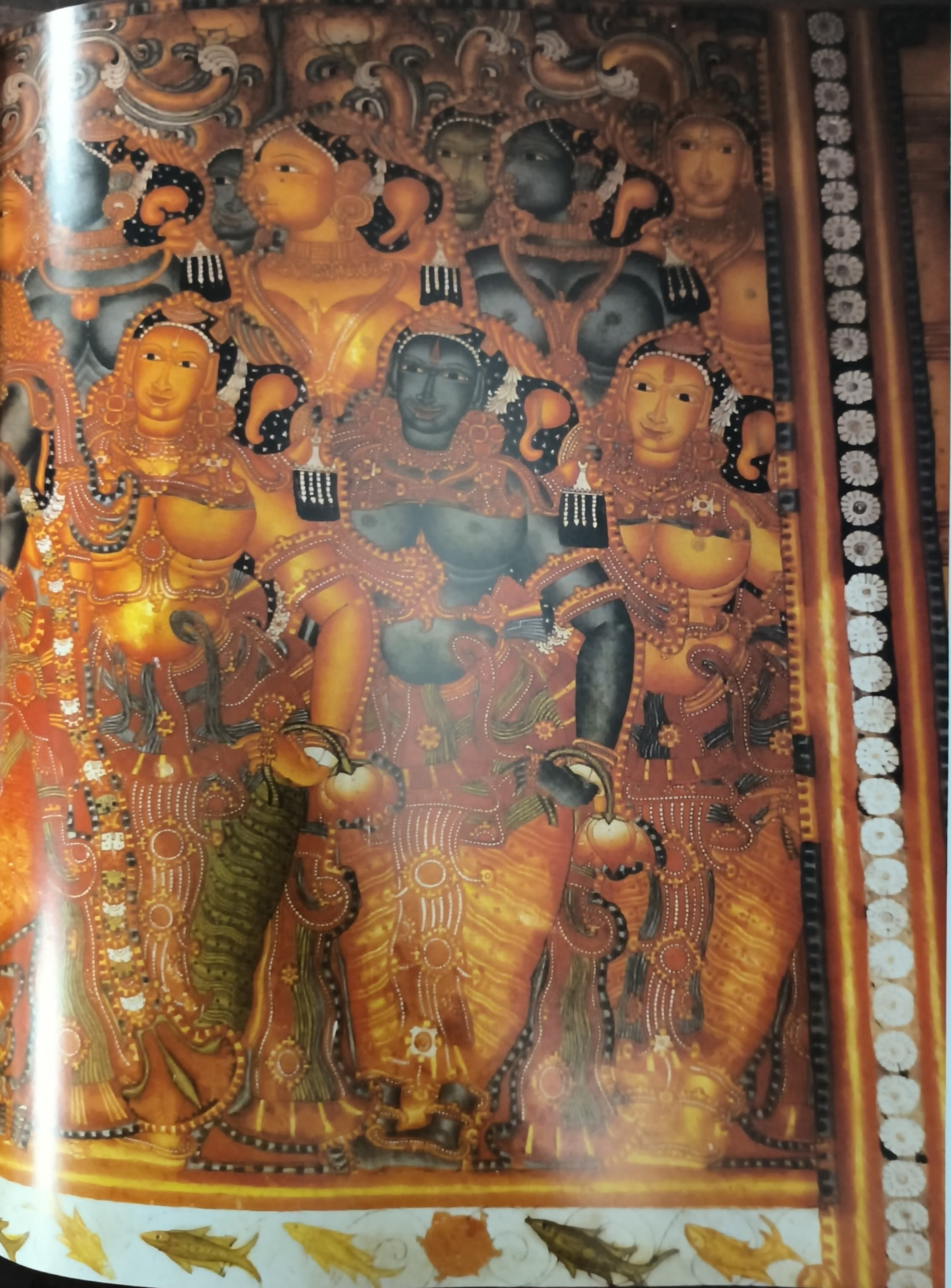
*Pages 178–179:*

**155** Padmanabhapuram,  
Padmanabhapuram Palace  
Temple—Shiva with his family

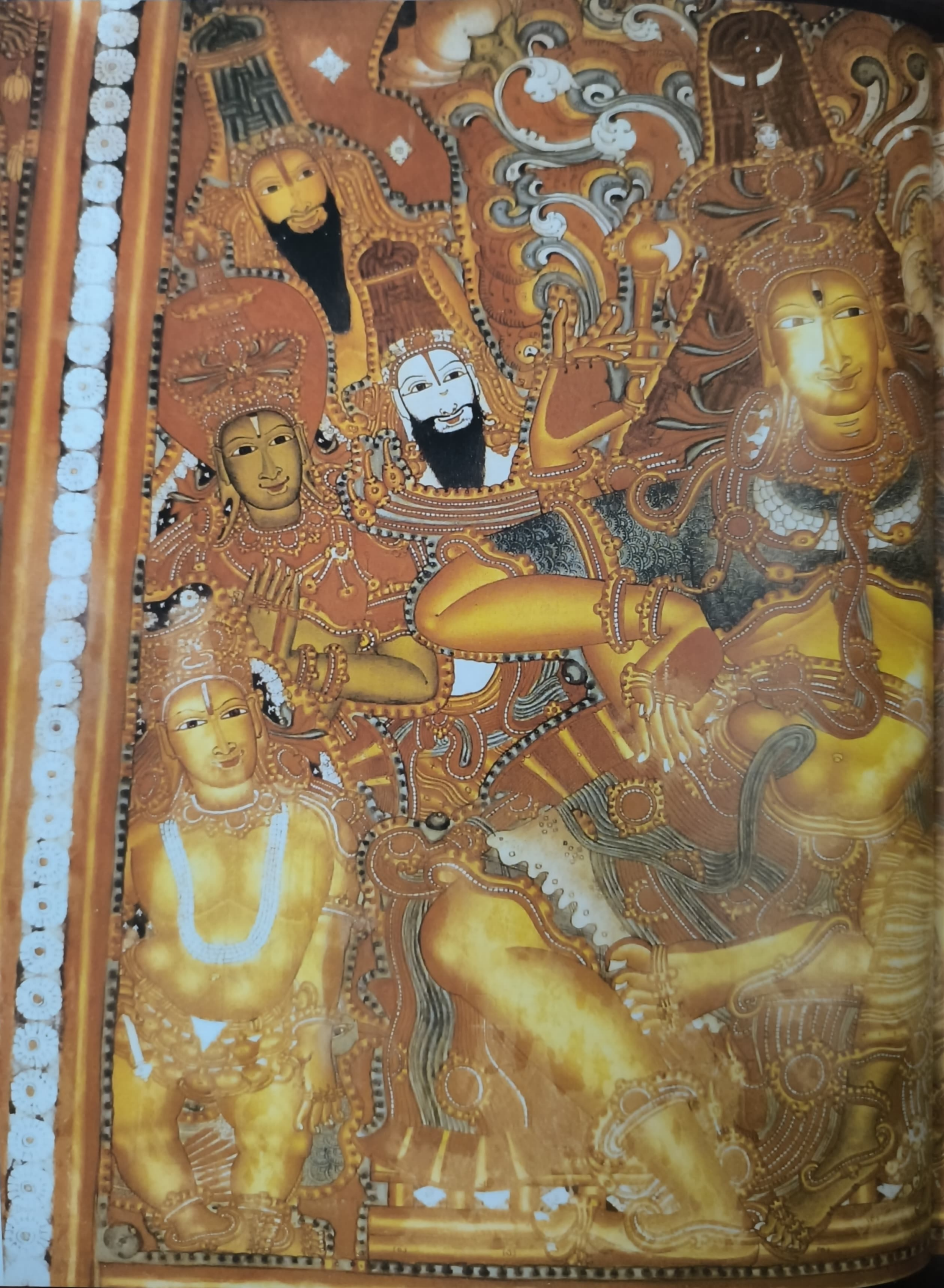




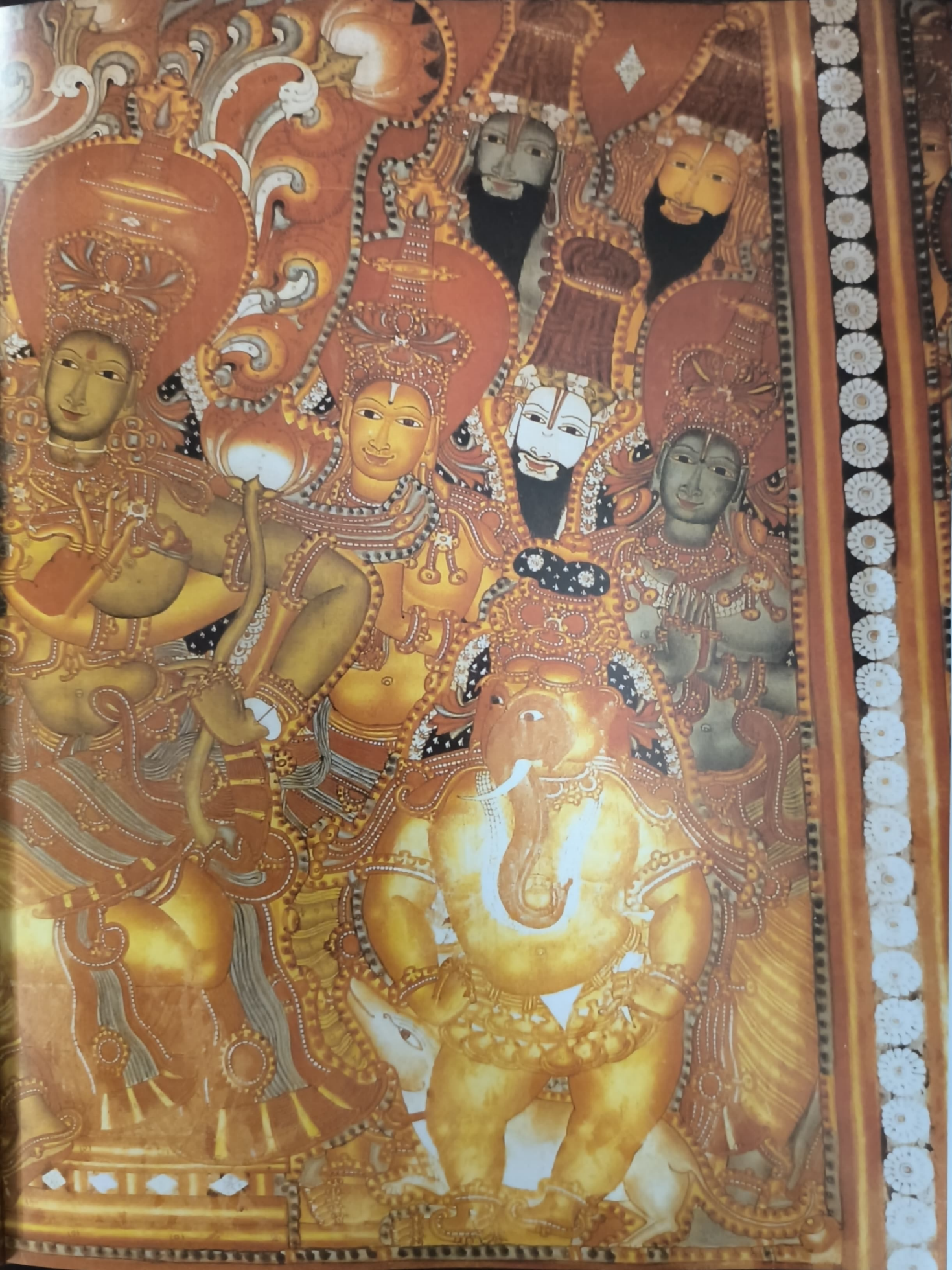




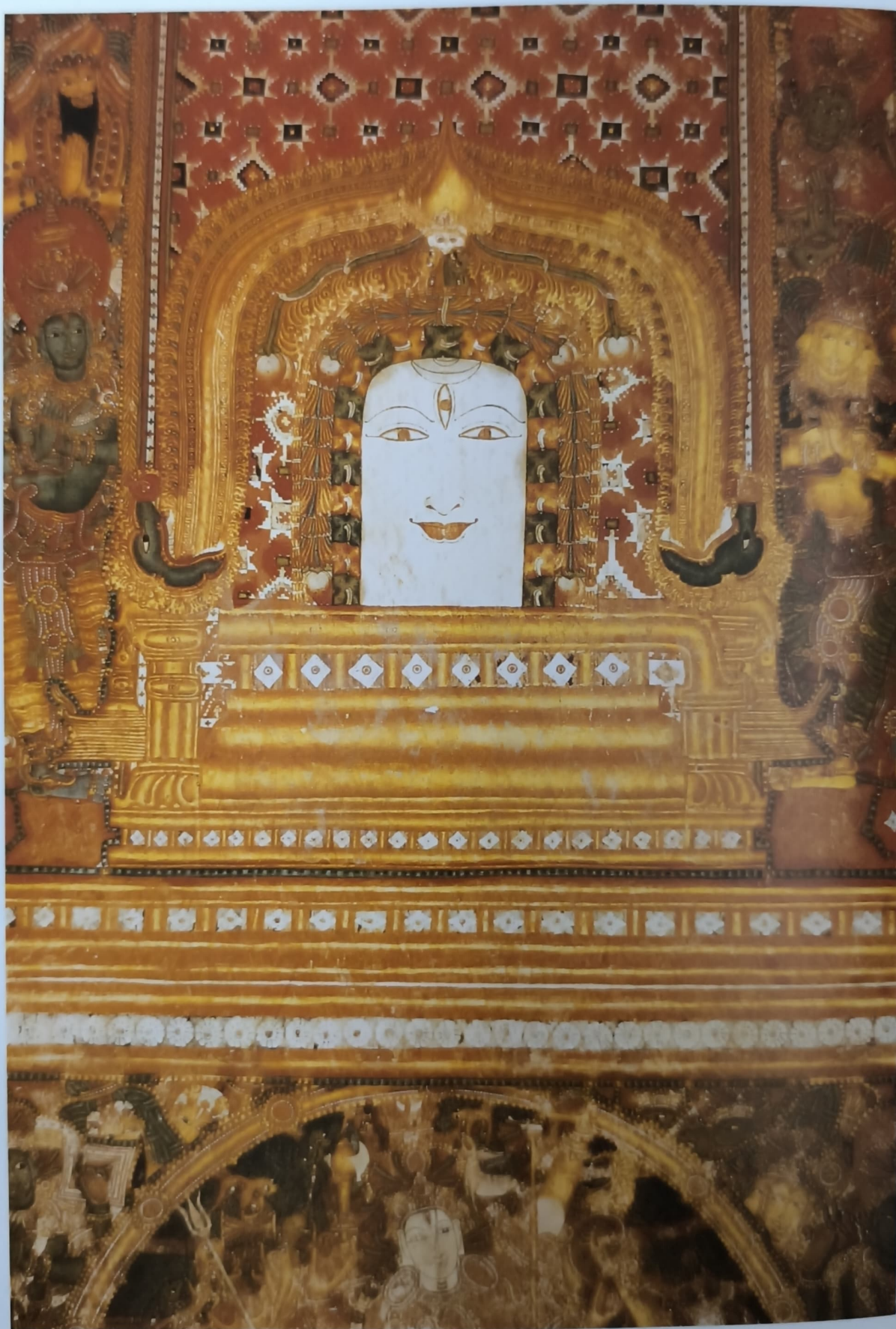
















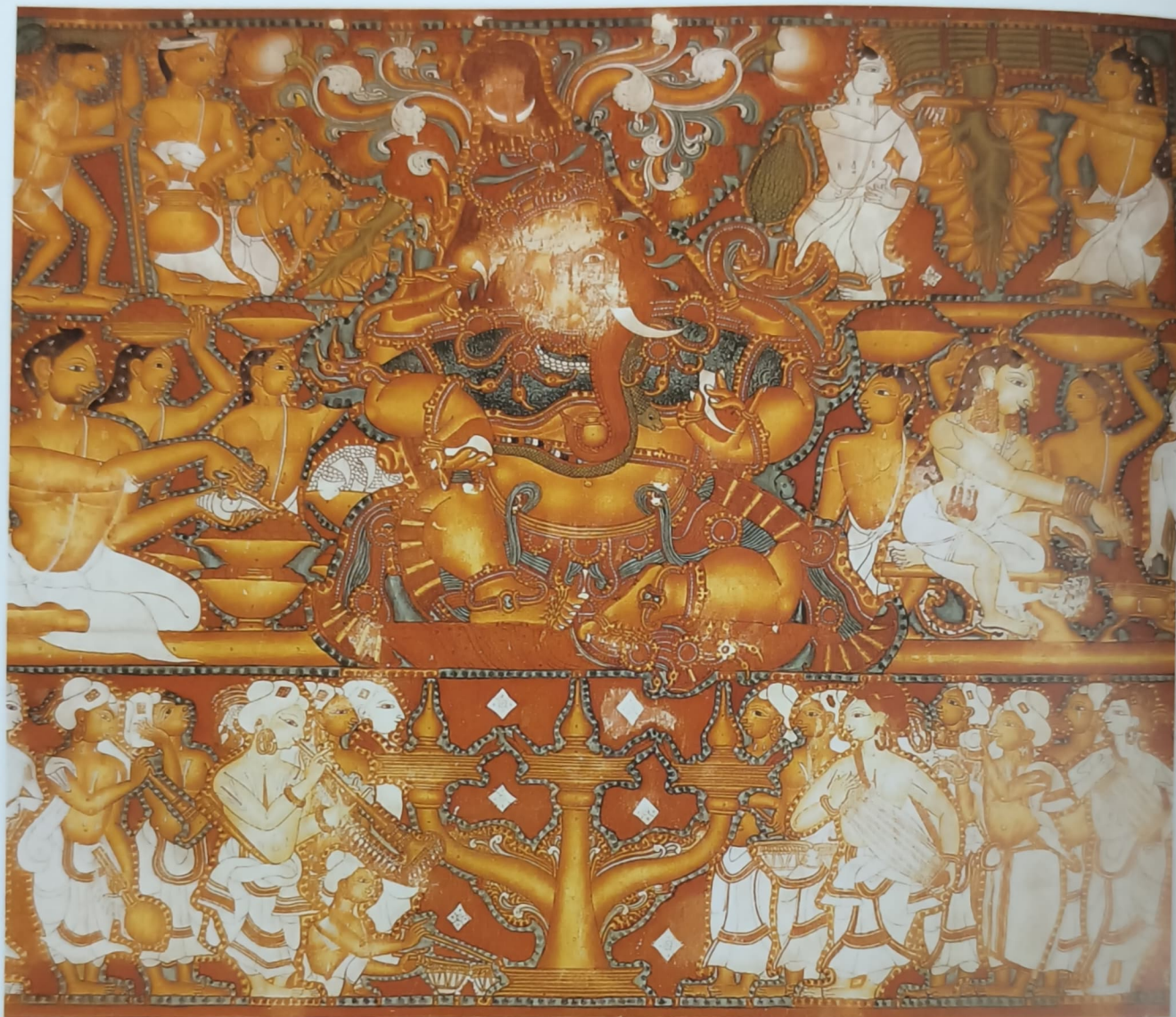
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**156** Padmanabhapuram,  
Padmanabhapuram Palace  
Temple—Shiva in his *linga* form

*Above:*

**157** Padmanabhapuram,  
Padmanabhapuram Palace  
Temple—A row of dancers





Above:

**158** Padmanabhapuram,  
Padmanabhapuram Palace  
Temple—Ganesha puja

Facing page:

**159** Krishnapuram, Krishnapuram  
Palace—Vishnu Padmaswami

of the house of Travancore, as Padmaswami or the lord of Lakshmi (Fig. 159). The panels below are most interesting (Fig. 160). Balagopala is in the center, with ordinary women paying homage on one side and *sadhus*, sages, on the other. This panel strongly resembles the style of the wall paintings of the Ettumanur Temple. A faded painting of Krishna playing on his flute is excellently drawn.

The Mattancheri Palace in Cochin (now Kochi) was built in 1555 by the Portuguese and added to later by the Dutch. The Portuguese presented the palace to Vira Keralavarman. Several rooms in the palace are covered with wall paintings. Sivaramamurti believes that they were painted during the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, with additions in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>122</sup> This dating does not seem correct. The paintings represent a very complex and evolved state of artistic development and do not appear to be earlier than the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, at best, contemporaneous with the Padmanabhapuram palace paintings of Martanda Varma. This dating would apply to the largest room in this palace,









Above:

**160** Krishnapuram, Krishnapuram Palace—Homage being paid to Bala Gopala

Facing page:

**161** Kochi, Mattancheri Palace—Vishnu

Following pages:

Page 186:

**162** Kochi, Mattancheri Palace—Rama's fury

Page 187:

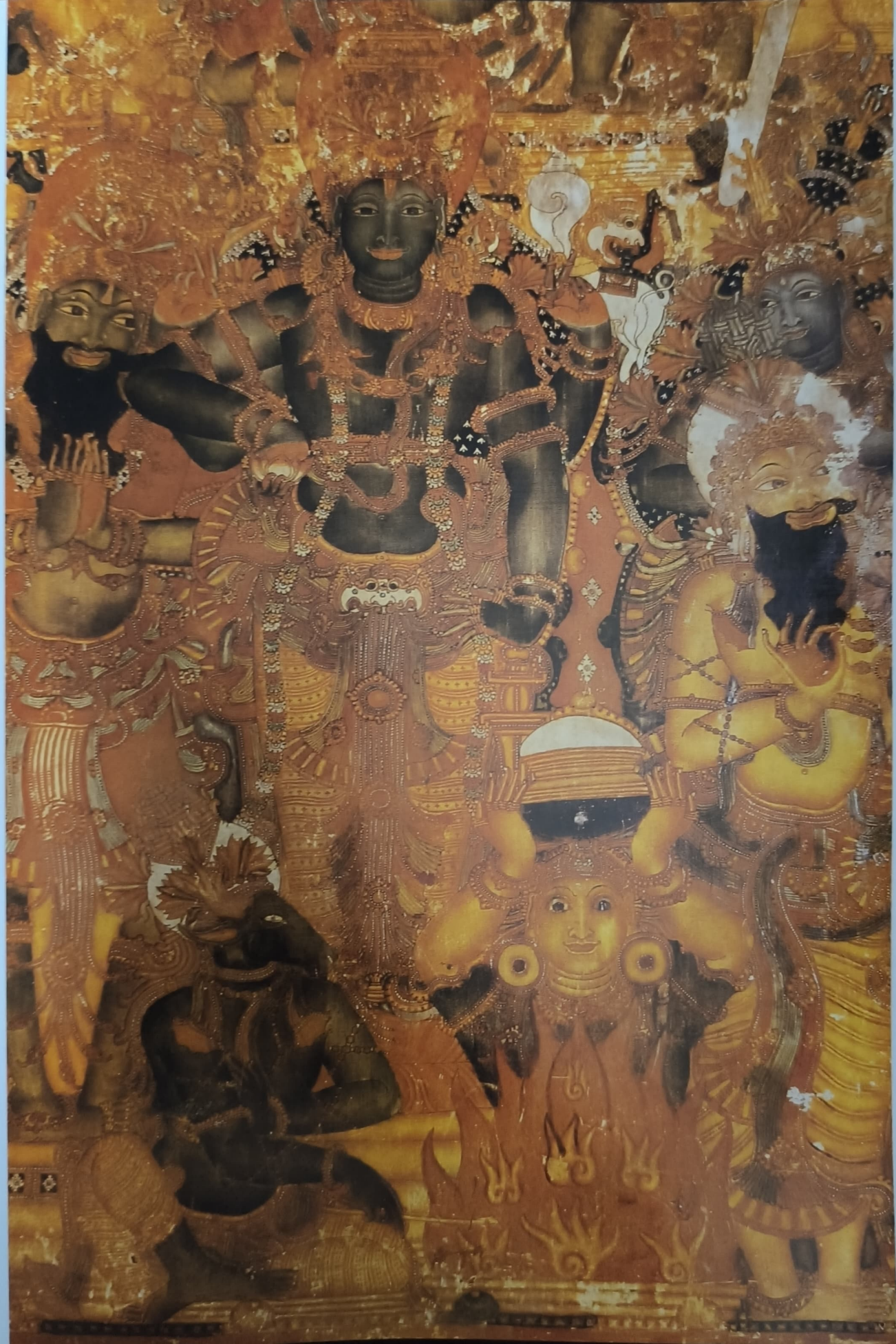
**163** Kochi, Mattancheri Palace—Ravana's terror

while the staircase room and the ladies' apartments in the basement could have been painted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The large upper room referred to as the "raja's audience room" by some and the "royal bed chamber" by others, has several illustrations of Vishnu and his *avatara* Rama, and Shiva, including a great painting of Vishnu standing in all his majesty (Fig. 161). The *Ramayana* is painted here with dramatic effect: Dasratha's *yagneya* for progeny, the birth of his sons, their departure to the forest with Vishwamitra and, above all, Rama's life in exile. The ferocity of the battle between Rama and Ravana is painted with an electrifying effect, unmatched in any other center of wall painting in India. Rama's expression shows bravery and anger (Fig. 162) and Ravana's face openly depicts terror and ferocity (Fig. 163). Rama and Sita are illustrated, after their return from exile, crowned as king and queen (Fig. 166).

There are also panels of Krishna and one of Vishnu standing with Sri and Lakshmi (Fig. 164). Shiva is painted with his family (Figs. 165, 167) and with an unusual set of devotees (Fig. 168).

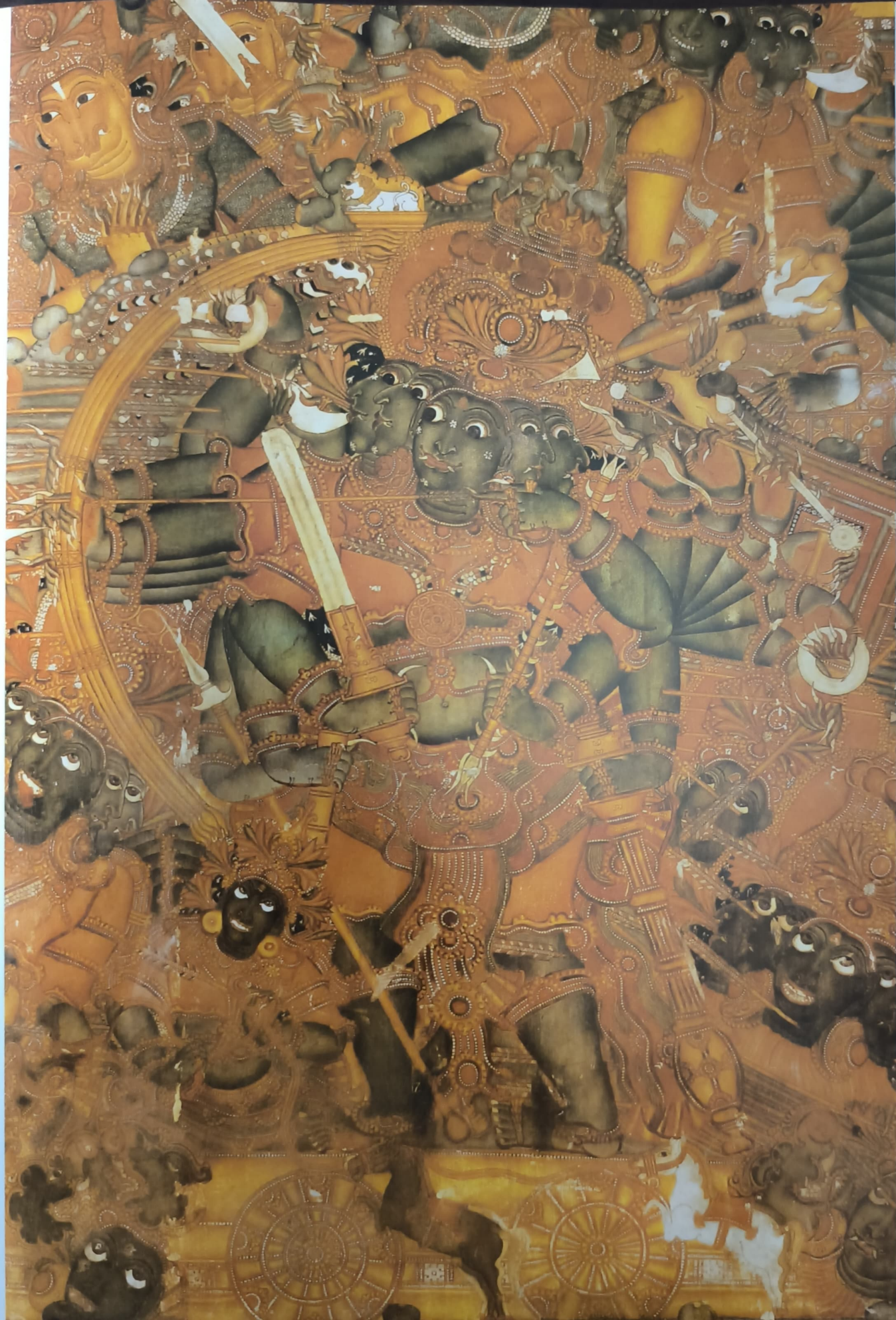
















Above:

164 Kochi, Mattancherry Palace—  
Vishnu with Lakshmi

Facing page:

165 Kochi, Mattancherry Palace—  
Shiva with his family

Following pages:

Pages 170–171:

166 Kochi, Mattancherry Palace—  
Rama and Sita

The paintings of Mattancherry Palace definitely indicate different periods of execution. The earliest panels are the ones in the largest room illustrating the story of the *Ramayana*, and are stylistically the best. The other rooms have very thinly painted panels, some even left unfinished, and do not appear to be earlier than the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

An assessment of the Kerala style thus indicates that these paintings belong to the genre of South Indian painting, all of them with a distinguished lineage and a long tradition from Ajanta onward. Their geographical propinquity thus gives them certain common features like large, voluminous male figures; modeled, muscular, highly ornamented bodies; and similar hairstyles and dresses. The costumes and ornaments of these figures are often common to all the schools of Indian painting. Interaction with the cultural trends of the contemporary schools of painting in the Vijayanagara and Nayaka periods can be expected, given their political contact. We do not yet have documentary evidence of artists migrating here, though it is traditionally believed that artists were invited from Tamil Nadu to paint the Padmanabhaswami Temple at Thiruvananthapuram. One family of Tamil-speaking artists still lives here for renovation

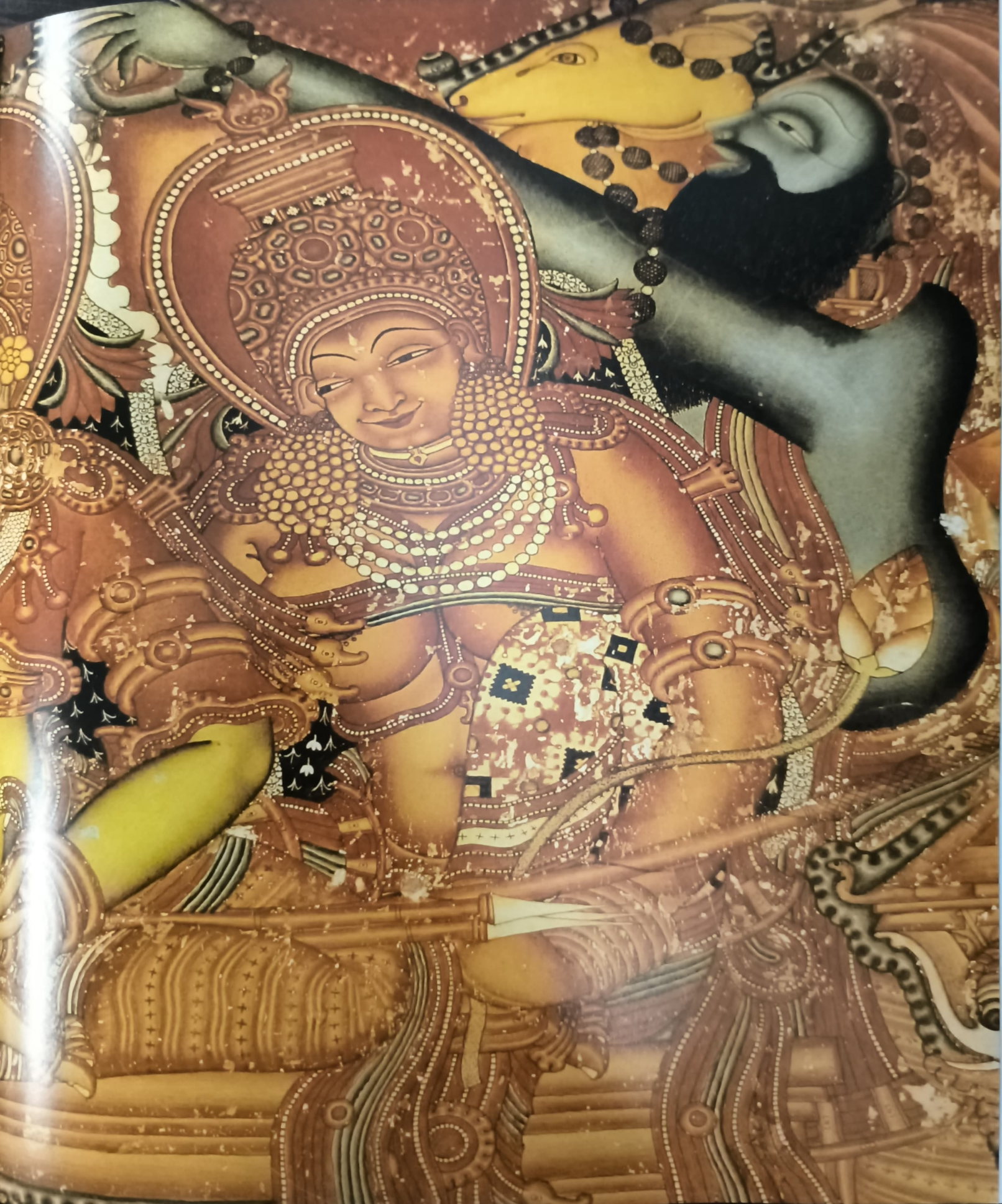




















work in this temple. In spite of this interaction, the Kerala School is distinct and unique in itself. There is a commonality of style that is ethnic and geographically rooted. The landscape in these centers is of Kerala, though used minimally. The ethnic types are also typically dark, muscular, swarthy men and women. The costumes and coiffure they wear are local and traditionally worn, especially those of the women. What is most remarkable is the essential rhythm in the bodies of most characters. This is the result not only of their fondness for the Kathakali, Kudiattam and Kuthu dance forms but also of the local atmosphere of thick forests, abundant trees, birdsong and rippling streams, which create a resonant atmosphere.

There is a great deal of emotional expression in these wall paintings. The human figures always seem to be gesticulating, wondering, awestruck, terrorized or angry. There is never a dull moment in their theatrical world.

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**167** Kochi, Mattancheri Palace—  
Kartikeyan, detail of Fig. 165

*Above:*

**168** Kochi, Mattancheri Palace—  
Shiva and Parvati with their  
devotees